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H. NEWMAN M.A.

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Chapter 1

MATTHEW ARNOLD : HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Matthew Arnold was born in Laleham, near Staines, in the county of Middlesex, on the Christmas Eve of 1822. He was the eldest son of Dr. Thomas Arnold, the famous headmaster of Rugby. His mother, Mary Penrose, was also a gifted lady. Young Matthew was fortunate enough to receive every care and attention from his parents in the matter of his upbringing. He had his preliminary education first at Laleham and next at Winchester. He entered his father's school in August 1837, and remained there for four years, imbibing the best influence of his reputed father. He later on paid a noble tribute to his revered father in his immortal verses of the *Rugby Chapel*. At Rugby he won a prize for poetry in 1840 for his poem *Alaric at Rome*. The poem was not much above the usual level of school-boy verses, but it showed the signs of the flowering of a great poetic genius. In 1841, Dr. Arnold was appointed Regius Professor of History at Oxford, and Matthew Arnold entered Balliol College, Oxford. Here he distinguished himself by winning several prizes in poetry and by general excellence in the classics. His poem on Cromwell brought him the Newdgate prize in 1843 at Oxford, where he contracted the noble friendship with Arthur Hugh Clough. His stay at Oxford was happiest and most profitable, as it inspired some of his loftiest poetry—*The Scholar Gipsy* and *Thyrsis*. Fashionable in his dress, witty in his conversation and banterings, Arnold moved like a "god among Oxford men." Principal J. C. Shairp has given an interesting account of Arnold's life during these under-graduate years in his poem *Balliol Scholars*, published in 1873 :

> The one wide-welcomed for a father's fame,
> Entered with free bold step that seemed to claim
> Fame for himself, nor on other lean.
> So full of power, yet blithe and debonair,
> Rallying his friends with pleasant banter gay,
> Or half a-dream chaunting with jaunty air
> Great words of Goethe, catch of Beranger,
> We see the banter sparkle in his prose,
> But know not then the undertone that flows
> So calmly sad, through all his stately lay.

After graduating with honour in classical studies from Oxford, Arnold searched for a footing in life. His father died in 1842 in his forty-seventh year, when Matthew Arnold was just twenty years of age. This sudden and premature death of his beloved father necessitated the discontinuation of his studies. So Arnold became a teacher of the classics at Rugby. In 1847, he became Private Secretary to Lord Lansdowne, who appointed the young poet to the position of Inspector of Schools under the Government. Arnold held this post till almost the sunset of his life. For a period of thirty-five years, Arnold worked very patiently, travelling about the country, examining teachers, and correcting endless examination papers. This occupation stifled his Muse to a considerable extent, but it brought Arnold a sort of financial stability. In June 1851, he married Miss Frances Lucy Wightman, daughter of a judge of the Queen's Bench. Eleven months later was born his eldest son Thomas—and now Arnold found himself securely settled in his new occupation.

The poetic fire was burning in his heart and he had not completely shaken off his dream of literary achievements. In 1849, he published the first volume of his verses, *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems* under the initial "A". But unfortunately this maiden venture of Arnold failed to receive any active response from the public. After a silence of three years he published a second volume —*Empedacles on Etna and Other Poems*—in 1852, but this also met the same fate in spite of the fact that it contained some of Arnold's best poems. This unmeaning apathy of the public could not, however, extinguish the poetic gleam of Arnold's heart. In 1853, he re-issued his first volume of poems under his full name and designation. From now onwards there appeared different editions of his poems with minor additions and substrations and Arnold became a famous name in poetry.

The year 1857 saw the enthronement of Matthew Arnold as Professor of Poetry at the Oxford University. Arnold, filled this coveted office for ten years and wrote most of his prose works during this period. He could not produce

any new poems, but he laid down the foundations of his critical principles and delivered many lectures on criticism. At Oxford he gave his famous lecture *On Translating Homer*. Then he produced *The Study of Literature* and *Essays in Criticism: First Series*. These made Arnold one of the best known literary men in England. Later on he poured out many important works—*Culture and Anarchy* (1869); *Literature and Dogma* (1873); *Mixed Essays* (1879); and *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* (1879). In all these volumes Arnold the critic comes before us—not only a critic of literature but also a critic of politics, theology, culture and society. Arnold as a critic spoke with the authentic voice of an Apostle of 'Sweetness and Light.' "Arnold says so" became a term in general use among the people. Never again since the days of Aristotle did the world see an individual enthroned so high in the realm of criticism. He was a critic as well as a creator. He was one of the few men who are almost equally important in the poetry and in prose, although posterity has ranked his verse higher than his prose.

Arnold wrote three more books on religious subjects —*St. Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *God and the Bible* (1875), and *Last Essays on Church and Religion* (1877). The *Discourses in America* (1885) completes the list of his important works. In 1883, after more than thirty years of service as Inspector of Schools, Arnold retired on a pension of £250 per annum. In the same year he went on a lecture tour to America and returned shortly. In 1885, he was asked by the Government to inquire into the worknig of elementary education in Germany, France, and Switzerland, and to submit his report. This was the last bit of his official work. On the 15th of April 1888, while he was going to see his elder daughter on her way home from the United States, he ran to catch a tram-car, and died in an instant of a sudden heart collapse. He was buried in the churchyard at Laleham. "The last Greek is gone," exclaimed those who knew how typical a Greek Arnold was throughout his life.

Professor V. N. Bhushan has paid a noble tribute to Arnold in his anthology of Arnold's poems. "Arnold died leaving behind him imperishable memories ; and still, 'the music of his name, through stately corridors of Fame resounds." He who strove to make knowledge grow from more to more, he who did his best to spread the gospel of Sweetness and Light, he who revealed that conduct is three-fourths life, he who emphasised that reverence in us should dwell—'that mind and soul according well may make one music vaster than before,'—he who did all this passed away bequeathing a rich "heritage to humanity."

Scholar, poet, critic, educationist, moralist, theologian, apostle—Arnold was personally a loving friend, a devoted husband and a considerate father. Mr. Russell describes him as an "active and singularly graceful man ; interested in all games and sports ; a splendid swimmer and fisherman ; wholly free from pomposity and stiffness ; overflowing with humanity, and pleasantly unguarded in his speech." Fastidious in his tastes, he appreciated and enjoyed life, combining in him a strange combination—gaiety and sobriety, the jubilant spirit of a youth with the serene contentment of a philosopher. Sociable, loveable, companionable—Arnold enjoyed the highest respect in the circles he was intimately known. Something of this radiant and sympathetic personality of Arnold penetrates and permeates all his writings and mellows even his melancholy into a wizardry of wistfulness."

The spirit of Arnold's whole life is enshrined in the following lines of his sonnet, *Quiet Work* :

One lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee,
One lesson which in every wind is blown,
One lesson of two duties kept at one
Though the loud world proclaim their enmity—
Of toil unsever'd from tranquillity ;
Of labour, that in lasting fruit outgrows
Far noisier schemes, accomplish'd in repose,
Too great for haste, too high for rivalry.

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE CHIEF CRITICAL WORKS OF ARNOLD

Arnold's poetical career came practically to an end in 1867 and he devoted the remaining twenty years of his life to criticism. His chief critical works are—*The Preface to the Poems of 1853*, *On Translating Homer*, *The Study of Celtic Literature*, *Essays in Criticism* (two volumes), and various articles contributed to different periodicals. We shall discuss the significance of each of them one by one.

1. THE PREFACE TO THE POEMS OF 1853

Arnold the critic appeared for the first time in his striking *Preface* to the Poems of 1853. He broke new ground in criticism and laid down, in embryo, the critical canons of his literary judgment. He launched his own manifesto and later on elaborated and amplified it. In the *Preface*, he laid emphasis on the importance of the subject—"the great action"—and the study of the ancients. According to him the subject of the poem should be sublime and serious, not trivial or slight. Only a sound subject matter can follow a 'grand style.' He elaborated this principle later on in his essay *The Study of Poetry* included in *Essays in Criticism: Second Series*. In laying insistence on the study of the ancients, Arnold had a specified object. He thought that the English intellect was fantastic and wanting in sanity. So he wanted to correct it by presribing the dose of the study of ancient classics. Greek thought and culture was a great source of admiration for Arnold. He had an undiluted veneration for everything Greek and he fed it with his intimate study of the classics and the fundamental principles that governed them. The

same he recommended for others. "It is time for us to Hellenise," he said, "and to praise knowing, for we have Hebraised too much and over-valued doing." Hence in order to improve the defects of the English intellect, he recommended the study of the ancient Greek masters. The pinciple was later on developed by Arnold in the form of his 'touchstone method' in the judgment of literature.

Thus in the *Preface*, Arnold struck a new note in English criticism. Hitherto Dryden had laid emphasis on the workmanship and not on the subject. But Arnold challenged the views of Dryden and claimed that the success of the poem essentially depends on the subject. If the subject is grand, the style will automatically follow its grandeur. "All depends upon the subject. Choose a fitting action, penetrate yourself with the feeling of its situations; this done, everything else will follow". According to Dryden "the story is the least part", but according to Matthew Arnold both the great action and grand treatment are necessary for making a poem really great. Therein lies the difference between the *Prefaces* by the two great poet-critics of the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries in England.

2. ON TRANSLATING HOMER (1861) :

The second important work which contains some of the most valuable principles of Arnold's criticism is *On Translating Homer*. Here 'Arnold applies himself to the actual appreciation of actual literature, and to the giving of reasons for his appreciation, in a way new, delightful, invaluable'.

He defines criticism as "*The endeavour, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is.*" Thus, for Arnold's criticism it has a wide range; it is a good deal more than mere literary criticism. This definition of criticism is the basis of Arnold's all critical works and it imparts a great value to *On Translating Homer*. Apart from this definition of criticism, another important feature of the tractate is its famous handling of "the grand style." Although the word first occurred in the *Preface*, and Arnold held the ancients as its "unapproached masters," he had not said much about it or attempted to

define it. Here he makes it the chief point of discussion and presents Homer, Dante, and Milton as the greatest masters of the grand style. Even Shakespeare, according to Arnold, lacks this quality. The other poets from Tennyson down to Young do not possess it at all. "*The grand style*," says Arnold, "*arises in poetry when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or severity a serious subject.*" This statement is a subject of great controversy and we leave it for detailed discussion later on. Here we may simply say with Professor Saintsbury that it is not just to limit the scope of the grand style to the simple or severe, and that it should not be denied to Donne or to Dryden, to Spenser or to Shelley. "The grand is the transcendent : and it is blasphemy against the Spirit of Poetry to limit the fashions and the conditions of transcendence."

3. The Study of Celtic Literature :

According to Professor Saintsbury, "*The Study of Celtic Literature* is tempting in promise, but disappointing in performance." It is not certain whether Arnold had a first-hand knowledge of Welsh, Breton, Cornish, Irish, or Scotch Gaelic. He generally quotes from the translations. His knowledge of the Celtic literature neither seems to be extensive nor accurate. He finds in Celtic literature the dominant characterstics of "melancholy," "natural magic" and "vagueness" and he, then, tries to trace these qualities in writers like Shakespeare and Keats. True, that Shakespeare and Keats possess these qualities, but how can Arnold justify (if he were alive) that they are due to the Celtic influence ? Neither Shakespeare nor Keats has the faintest evidence of Celtic blood or Celtic influence. It is these general assumptions, without any solid proof, that spoil the critical judgements of Arnold. Professor Saintsbury has rightly remarked that with bricks of ignorance and mortar of assumption one cannot build a critical house.

4. Essays in Criticism :

The two volumes of *Essays in Criticism* (1865-1888) occupy the first place among Arnold's prose works. They

are the best known of his critical works—except perhaps the *Preface* to Ward's *Poets*. The first two essays *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* and the *Influence of Academies* soberly treat of the main ideas expressed in the old *Preface* of 1853. An oft-quoted passage in the essay on *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* declares that the rule for English criticism may be summed up in one word—'*disinterestedness*.' He further elaborates the term '*disinterestedness*' and explains that it can be shown by "keeping aloof from what is called 'the practical view of things.' The criticism of literature, he means, must not be prejudiced by any considerations of religion or politics or even personal likes and dislikes. It should not be conditioned by any caprice, waywardness, or "provinciality." It should be above all these things. "I wish to decide," he declares, "nothing of my own authority; the great art of criticism is to get oneself out of the way and to let humanity decide." Only thus can criticism be of any value to society. Criticism, in order to be of first rate, must be free from 'the practical view of things.' By the 'practical view' Arnold means the 'view distorted by irrelevant considerations.' In his *Preface* to *Essays in Criticism*, he advises "to try and approach truth on one side after another, not to strive or cry, nor to persist in pressing forward, on any one side, with violence and self-will,—it is only thus, it seems to me, that mortals may hope to gain any vision of the mysterious goddess, whom we shall never see except in outline, but only thus even in outline."

In the essay on the *Literary Influence of Academies* Arnold criticises the provincial spirit. "The provincial spirit," he argues, "exaggerates the value of its ideas for want of a high standard at hand by which to try them. Or rather, for want of such a standard, it gives one idea too much prominence at the expense of others ; it orders its ideas amiss ; it is hurried away by fancies ; it likes and dislikes too passionately, too exclusively. Its admiration weeps hysterical tears, and its disappropriation foams at the mouth. So we get the *eruptive* and the *aggressive* manner in literature ; the former prevails most in our

criticism, the latter in our newspapers. For, not having the lucidity of a large and centrally placed intelligence, the provincial spirit has not its graciousness ; it does not persuade, it makes war ; it has not urbanity, the tone of the city, of the centre, the tone which always aims at a spiritual and intellectual effect, and not excluding the use of banter, never disjoins banter itself from politeness, from felicity." "No more admirable account," comments Hugh Walker, "could be penned, both of what Arnold consistently avoided, and of what he aimed at and did. He never weeps hysterical tears, never foams at the mouth, never makes war. He is always gracious and urbane, and his banter is never disjoined from politeness."

If a choice be made among these essays, which are all worthy of study, we would suggest *The Study of Poetry*, *Wordsworth*, *Byron*, *Thomas Gray*, *Shelley*, *Keats*, *Milton* and *Emerson*. We may or may not agree with Arnold's critical canons and individual judgments on different poets, but the general critical quality and accomplishment of these essays cannot be denied. The appearance of his *Essays in Criticism* marked the advent of a new force in English criticism and of a new manner of prose. The book was something of a literary sensation by virtue of its style, the novelty and confidence of its opinions and the wide and curious range of its subjects. It struck a note of challenge to all the popular critics of the day and pierced through the armour of self-sufficiency and provinciality in criticism. It was an attempt to define and illustrate in practice the vital functions of criticism. Herbert Paul remarks that the *Essays in Criticism* is "one of the indispensable books. Not to have read it is to be ignorant of a great intellectual event." "Mr. Arnold," continues Prof. Herbert Paul, "did not merely criticise books himself. He taught others how to criticise them. He laid down principles, if he did not always keep the principles he laid down. Nobody, after reading *Essays in Criticism*, has any excuse for not being a critic."

5. Social, Political and Theological Criticism

As has already been pointed out, Arnold was not

only a critic of literature but also of society. He defined criticism as "the endeavour, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is." And as such in some of his works he has given social, political and theological criticism which deserves some notice. His first separate publication in prose was a political pamphlet, *England and the Italian Question* (1859), and the political interest is found everywhere in his literary criticisms. Another important volume is *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) which has been described by Arnold as "an essay in political and social criticism." This book contains most of the terms—culture, sweetness and light, Barbarian, Philistine, Hebraism and many others—which are now associated with Arnold's work and influence. The other important books which contain political criticism are *Mixed Essays* (1879), *Irish Essays* (1882) and *Discourses in America* (1885) His best social criticism is contained in *Friendship's Garland* (1871), a collection of letters which first appeared in *The Pall-Mall Gazette* between 1866 and 1870. These letters have a rich element of Arnold's wit and humour, although their purpose is always serious. Many of these political essays have lost their value due to the change in political view, but still they contain some of the eternal charm and permanent value.

Among the theological writings of Matthew Arnold special mention be made of *St. Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *Literature and Dogma* (1873), *God and the Bible* (1875) and *Last Essays on Church and Religion* (1877). In all these religious writings Arnold criticises the dogmatic element in religion and opposes all creeds. He believes that religion must be freed from 'stereotyped theology.' It must receive new ideas from time to time. The greatest of his books on religious criticism is *Literature and Dogma* which created a great deal of commotion among the people of his times. But to call him irreligious is to mistake the man. "It will more and more become evident," he said in one of his letters, "how entirely religious is the work I have done in *Literature and Dogma*. The enemies of religion see this well enough already." In general, the

book is a plea for liberality in religion. Arnold, as Prof. Long suggests, would have us read the Bible, for instance, as we would read any other great work, and apply to it the ordinary standards of literary criticism. The greatest merit of these religious criticisms is that "they face the question of the possible disappearance of all existing forms of faith, and the rejection of what is called 'supernaturalism' and they indicate the belief of the writer that even if theology were swept into the rubbish-keep of forgotten literature, and miracles were universally rejected, what is life-giving and sustaining in religion would still remain."

CHAPTER III

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES ON ARNOLD AS A CRITIC

Although every great writer lives by virtue of his own genius and individuality, yet, consciously or unconsciously, he imbibes the influences of the persons he comes in contact with, of the environment in which he lives and the atmosphere he breathes in. These influences should not be taken too seriously, but the fact remains that they *do* shape the thoughts of a man and colour his imagination and critical powers. Arnold's thought and temperament were also moulded by several external influences. His note-books clearly show the richness and diversity of the materials that he constantly kept on gathering from half a dozen languages and literatures. In the course of his correspondence with Cardinal Newman in 1872, Arnold himself has expressed his special indebtedness to some of the major influences which moulded his thought : "There are four people in especial, from whom I am conscious of having learnt—a very different thing from merely receiving a strong impression—learnt habits, methods, ruling ideas, which are constantly with me; and these four are—Goethe, Wordsworth, Sainte-Beuve and yourself."

INFLUENCE OF THE CLASSICS:

The greatest influence on Arnold was that of the classics. He had a deep admiration for Greek thought and culture. He thoroughly acquainted himself with the great classical works of the Greek masters. He said, "It is time for us to Hellenise and to praise *knowing*, for we have Hebraised too much and over-valued *doing*." He drank deep at the fountains of Homer, Sophocles and Epictetus. The Greek thought penetrated not only the

fabric of his poetry but it governed his general principles of criticism also. He advised the study of the ancients in order to bring "sanity" to the English intellect. During his college days,. he was regarded as the best scholar of the classics and later on he taught them for some time in the Rugby School. The classical influence may be discerned in almost all the critical works of Arnold. In his *Preface to the Poems of 1853*, he pleads the case for the study of the classics. In *On Transalating Homer* he actually appreciates Greek literature and gives reasons for his appreciation in a new and delightful way. He regards the Greeks as "unapproached masters." In them alone he finds the best illustration of "the grand style", simplicity and lucidity. In the *Literary Influence of Academies*, he again pays high tributes to the Greek masters. Only those who knew Arnold well can imagine how deeply was he steeped in Greek thought and culture !

Influence of Goethe

Arnold is immensely indebted to the German writer, Goethe. In fact, his intellectual descent is to be traced from Goethe. Even during his college days, Arnold put Goethe upon "the intellectual throne", and later on he paid him his finest critical tribute in *Memorial Verses* :

> When Goethe's death was told, we said—
> Sunk, then, is Europe's sagest head.
> Physician of the Iron Age,
> Goethe has done his pilgrimage.
> He took the suffering human race,
> He read each wound, each weakness clear—
> And struck his finger on the place
> And said—Thou ailest here, and here,—
> He look'd on Europe's dying hour
> Of fitful dream and feverish power;

His eye plunged down the weltering strife,
The turmoil of expiring life;
He said—The end is everywhere :
Art still has truth, take refuge there—

Arnold learned much from Goethe. "Steeped in and disciplined by the past yet no traditionalist, loftily surveying the possibilities of a world culture and condemning provincialism, devoted to natural science as the guide to truth yet always from the large point of view and aiming at an imaginative synthesis, Goethe was for Arnold *the* great figure of modern times."

His love of self-culture and the lucidity of enthusiastic self-study are derived from Goethe. 'From Goethe he learnt to treat his own individuality with a certain exaltation of touch, an air of Olympic dignity, and grace.' Some of the chief critical principles of Arnold are also derived from Goethe. Goethe said: "Poetry of the highest type manifests itself as altogether objective; when once it withdraws itself from the external world to become subjective it begins to degenerate. So long as the poet gives utterance merely to his subjective feelings, he has no right to the title." Arnold also lays emphasis on "the great action" in poetry, which is possible only when the poet observes detached aloofness. Both Goethe and Arnold owed their inspiration to the Greeks. Goethe was as direct as the Greek. "The plot is the first thing", said Aristotle. "The true power of a poem consists in the situation—in the Motive," said Goethe. "All depends upon the subject. Choose a fitting action, penetrate yourself with the feeling of its situations; this done, everything else will follow"—thus writes Matthew Arnold. What a deep affinity is there between the thoughts of Goethe and Arnold ! But Arnold could not fully emulate Goethe's motive of work and he frankly confessed it in *Obermann* :

And Goethe's course few sons of men
May think to emulate.
For he pursued a lonely road,
His eye on nature's plan ;

Neither made man too much a God,
Nor God too much a man.
Strong was he, with a spirit free
From mists, and sane, and clear;
Clearer, how much ! than ours : yet we
Have a worse course to steer.

Influence of the French Writers: Sainte-Beuve and Senancour

Arnold's avowed master in criticism was the famous French critic, Sainte-Beuve. Arnold met him, in 1859, at Paris where he went on an official tour as Foreign Assistant Commissioner of Education. Arnold was already at the peak of his fame at that time and he was much talked about in literary circles. In 1861 Sainte-Beuve did Arnold a singular honour by translating into French his poem *Obermann* and publishing it in his volume on Chateaubriand. Indeed, it was under the inspiration of Sainte-Beuve that Arnold left the enchanted realm of poetry and devoted himself to criticism.

"Saint-Beuve's influence", says William Robbins, "was mainly in the field of literary criticism, a matter of 'method', to use Arnold's own word. His tact, his humanistic standards, the objectivity and *curiosite* which made of him a 'naturalist' in literary and other criticism, above all, the balance struck with unerring precision—these were what Arnold admired and tried to emulate." To Arnold, Sainte-Beuve was 'the first of living critics', an estimate avowed not only in letters to his mother and to Sainte-Beuve himself but also in published utterances. The flexibility, the delicacy, and the disinterested curiosity of the French critic had earned him this position. It was Sainte-Beuve who first propounded the doctrine of 'disinterestedness' in his essay on *Mademoiselle de'L Espinasse*. He said that a critic should have no special views to propagate, no strong bent in religion, no passion towards life, no predilections disposing him to favour this or that opinion, this or that form of art. He should have no philosophic system. Distractions of this kind

would limit his proper critical genius. He must be the same to all men. In a word, he should develop the quality of "aloofness" and "disinterestedness." Sainte-Beuve also held that in order to understand a literary work it was necessary to understand its author. "Literature," said Saint-Beuve, "literary production, is not for me distinct or at least separable from the rest of man and human organisation; I can taste a work, but it is difficult for me to judge it independently of my knowledge of the man himself. Arnold also held similar views and in passing his judgement he considered the works as well as the life of an author, literature for him was a criticism of life, and the critic of that criticism was a critic of literature and life together. Arnold's *Essays in Criticism* are criticisms of literature and life together. For example, in his essays on Keats and Shelley he uses the biographical information abundantly in appreciating their poetry (sometimes, he even misuses the biographical information). Herbert Paul has summed up in one sentence Arnold's debt to the great French critic—'He idolised Sainte-Beuve.'

Arnold was influenced by another French writer and thinker, Senancour, popularly known as Obermann on account of his important work published under that name. Senancour's influence on Arnold was second only to that of Goethe. Arnold paid him his best tribute in two long poems *Obermann* and *Obermann Once More.* Arnold became acquainted with Obermann's work by about the year 1846—through George Sand [the pseudonym of Armandine Lucile Aurore Dupin (1804-1876)], the famous French woman-novelist, and later, through Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869), Arnold became such a great admirer of Obermann that several of his (Obermann's) ideas found an echo in Arnold's works. In his note appended to *Obermann Once More* Arnold writes : "The author of Obermann, Etienne Pivert de Senancour, has little celebrity in France, his own country; and out of France he is almost unknown. But the profound inwardness, the austere sincerity, of his principal work, *Obermann*, the delicate feeling for nature which it exhibits, and the melancholy eloquence of many passages of it have attracted and charmed some of

the most remarkable spirits of this century, such as George Sand and Saint-Beuve, and will probably always find a certain number of spirits whom they touch and interest." Arnold was one of such spirits whom Senancour touched deeply. Mrs. Iris Esther Sells in her book *Matthew Arnold and France* has taken great pains to prove—by quoting parallel passages—Arnold's intellectual debt to Senancour. Any reader of that book will be convinced how deeply Senancour's thought sank into Arnold's mind, and how the English disciple almost echoes his French master many a time."

CHAPTER IV

ARNOLD'S CANONS OF CRITICISM

Arnold has his own canons of criticism. He launched his critical manifesto as early as any man can be capable of forming a critical judgment—a judgment which is not a mere adaptation of some one else's but his own. Once he formed his critical ideal, he devoted himself to the application and amplification of that ideal in all his later works. Arnold defined criticism as "*a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.*" The first principle of criticism is, according to Matthew Arnold, *disinterestedness*, which is to be attained by "keeping aloof from what is called 'the practical view of things'." The practical view, so-called, is the view distorted by irrelevant considerations—political, social or religious. The critic must be free from all prejudices—personal or historical. He should not favour this or that opinion, this or that form of art. He must be the same to all men. To be self-centred or self-willed is absolutely incompatible with useful criticism. The true ideal of criticism is "disinterested objectivity." The critic should have no strong bent in religion, no special view in politics, no art of his own, and no philosophic system to propagate. Distractions of this kind would limit his proper critical genius. To put it in the words of Scott-James, a critic "must be tolerant, dispassionate, balanced, curious, aware that "everything is possible and nothing certain." Arnold recommends the study of the ancient Greek masters because they possess this quality of "disinterested objectivity" in an abundant degree.

Disinterestedness, then, is the first and greatest rule of criticism. With this goes knowledge. A critic cannot be disinterested unless he is well equipped with

knowledge—knowledge of the best that has been thought and said in the world—the best not from the stand-point of a personal estimate or from that of a historical estimate, but from the stand-point of genuine intrinsic excellence, unprejudiced by any consideration of personal likes and dislikes or by those of place and time. "I wish to decide nothing of my own authority," said Arnold; "the great art of critscism is to get oneself out of the way and to let humanity decide." Thus, Arnold firmly adheres to the cosmopolitan view of criticism. He wants to lift criticism above the barriers of time and place. The critic must know the best that has been thought and said, both in ancient and in modern times, not only in his own language but also in the languages from which his native literature is derived, and in those which are producing literature concurrently. It is, thus, by the comparative method, by seeing how others do what we also are impelled to attempt, that "provinciality" is avoided. Criticism, according to Arnold, must be an antidote to parochialism. He severely criticises the provincial spirit in his essay on the *Literary Influence of Academies*. "The provincial spirit," he says, "exaggerates the value of its ideas for want of a high standard at hand by which to try them. Or rather, for want of such a standard, it gives one idea too much prominence at the expense of others; it orders its ideas amiss; it is hurried away by fancies; it likes and dislikes too passionately, too exclusively. Its admiration weeps hysterical tears, and its disapprobation foams at the mouth. So we get the *eruptive* and the *aggressive* manner in literature; the former prevails most in our criticism, the latter in our newspapers. For, not having the lucidity of a large and centrally placed intelligence, the provincial spirit has not its graciousness; it does not persuade, it makes war; it has not urbanity, the tone of the city, of the centre, the tone which always aims at a spiritual and intellectual effect, and not excluding the use of banter, never disjoins banter itself from politeness, from felicity." Arnold criticises the deficiency of the knowledge of the best (that has been thought and said in the world) in England. "We show, as a nation, laudable energy and persistence in

walking according to the best light that we have, but are not quite careful enough, perhaps, to see that our light be not darkness." That is why Arnold insists on a vast knowledge—a knowledge which may show the critic the true light of reason. But Arnold was, at the same time, fully alive to the dangers of a vast load of learning. He does not recommend the learning of *everything*, he confines himself only to *the best*. The critic has to use his own discretion. He has to select and assimilate the best. Sometimes a critic is tempted to magnify the achievements of a very minor poet simply because that poet happens to occupy an important position from the historical estimate. That is not just, not wise. The true function of a critic is neither to magnify nor to depreciate by partial representation, but to hold out the light of reason whatever it might discover. Literary judgment must be free from the caprices of fancy, the anarchy of ignorance and the tyranny of prescriptions. Arnold himself was very serious in his answer to an antagonist who charged him with ignorance. He frankly pleaded guilty to the charge and answered : "And yet, perverse as it seems to say so, I sometimes find myself wishing, when dealing with these matters of poetical criticism, that my ignorance were even greater than it is. To handle these matters properly there is needed a poise so perfect that the least overweight in any direction tends to destroy the balance. Temper destroys it, a crotchet destroys it, even erudition may destroy it. To press to the sense of the thing itself with which one is dealing, not to go off on some collateral issue about the thing, is the hardest matter in the world. The 'thing itself' with which one is here dealing,—the critical perception of poetic truth,—is of all things the most volatile, elusive, and evanescent; by even pressing too impetuously after it, one runs the risk of losing it. The critic of poetry should have the finest tact, the nicest moderation, the most free, flexible, and elastic spirit imaginable.........The less he can deal with his subject simply and freely, the more things he has to take into account in dealing with it,—the more, in short, he has to encumber himself,—so much the greater force of spirit he needs to retain its elasticity. But one

cannot exactly have this greater force by wishing for it; so, for the force of spirit one has, the load upon it is often heavier that it will well bear. The late Duke of Wellington said of a certain peer that 'it was a great pity his education had been so far too much for his abilities'. In like manner one often sees erudition out of all proportion to its owner's critical faculty. Little as I know, therefore, I am always apprehensive, in dealing with poetry, lest even that little should prove "too much for my abilities."

The greatest function of criticism, then, is to "see the object as in itself it really is." It should never relinquish its vision of what *might be* or *can be* ; it should simply satisfy itself with what *is*.

> Criticism must maintain its independence of the practical spirit and its aims. Even with well-meant efforts of the practical spirit it must express dissatisfaction if in the sphere of the ideal they seem impoverishing and limiting. It must not hurry on the goal because of its practical importance. It must be patient, and know how to wait; and be flexible, and know how to attach itself to things and how to withdraw from them.

Criticism should perform, according to Matthew Arnold, even more difficult things than this:

> It must be apt to study and praise elements that for the fulness of spiritual perfection are wanted, even though they belong to a power which in the practical sphere may be maleficent. It must be apt to discern the spiritual shortcomings or illusions of powers that in the practical sphere may be beneficent.

Commenting on this passage Loinel Trilling has observed :

"Perhaps no man has ever formulated—though some have practised—so difficult an intellectual course. 'To study and praise elements that for the fulness of spiritual perfection are wanted, even though they belong to a power

which in the practical sphere may be maleficent !' It is dangerous but it is a necessary study for cultural completeness; only the man of perfect equipoise and great spiritual strength may undertake it, the man utterly sure of the beneficent goal toward which he is striving. Here, if anywhere, we have the key to Arnold's importance and to his method. Here, too, we have the key to the reason why he is the common butt of people of such diverse views, and why he is admired by people who harm him with their admiration."

Another function of criticism, according to Arnold, is "to create a current of true and fresh ideas. Its business is to do this with inflexible honesty, with due ability ; but its business is to do no more, and leave alone all questions of practical consequences and applications, questions which will never fail to have due prominence given to them." Scott-James has rightly remarked that Arnold's criticism "was on the way to become a branch of social reform. And perhaps it was for this reason that his doctrines readily took root in England, appealing to the practical English mind which he had himself so sternly criticised. It came to pass that the apostle of 'disinterestedness' appealed to the apostles of betterment." Thus Arnold gave a new task to criticism--to prepare a social atmosphere which will stimulate the artist—to make the best that has been written familiar to the public.

Summing up the chief canons of Arnold's critical ideal, we may say that, in the first place, it is the duty of a critic to develop the attitude of objective detachment or disinterestedness. Then he should learn and understand 'the best that is known and thought in the world.' He must "see things as they really are." Thus equipped, with knowledge and the power of detached objectivity, the critic's second task is "to hand on his idea to others, convert the world, to "make the best ideas prevail." His work in his respect is that of a missionary. But, thirdly, he is also preparing an atmosphere favourable for the creative genius of the future—promoting "a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power."

A critic, according to Matthew Arnold, is a man of culture concerned with all aspects of living—religous, political, social, philosophical, historical, scientific. His function as a literary critic is, therefore, 'to promote that part of culture which depends upon knowledge of letters.' Culture, for Arnold, has also a moral aspect. "It is a *study of perfection* which moves by the force, not only of the passion for knowledge but also of "the moral and social passion for doing good."

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CHAPTER V

LIMITATIONS OF ARNOLD AS A CRITIC

Professor H. W. Garrod has remarked that Matthew Arnold was 'a man of letters who became a literary critic by accident.' He was primarily interested in educational, political, and theological subjects. He turned to criticism only casually, and the few works of pure literary criticism that he has to his credit are the by-products of his genius. The Oxford Professorship gave him incentive for writing literary criticism, although he was elected to the post not because he was a critic but because he was a poet. "Save for the accident of the Oxford Professorship," says Professor Garrod, "I am not sure that it was in his heart to be a literary critic at all...Nor for the most part was Matthew Arnold's public interested in him as a literary critic." He was interested in the welfare of his people more than in anything else. "The vendor of the Frenchified disinterestedness was a hardworking school inspector with a national mission." This is evident from the tone in which he speaks of literary criticism. He claims to write criticism. Literature for him was a criticism of life and a critic of literatute had to be a critic both of life and literature. He giveis a wider meaning to the term criticism. Purely literary crit cism was not his forte. Whenever he speaks of literary criticism or of the literary critics, he prefixed, like Keble, Newman and Ruskin, a derogative and speaks of mere literary criticism, the 'mere' literary critic.

Arnold was not a scientific critic. He was much more of a moralist. He thinks too much of the uses of literature, and too little of its pleasures. He attaches too much importance to taste, and too little to relish. By the waters of Helicon, he sits down and sips, sampling them with the meticulous satisfaction of the winetaster. It is horrible

to see him, sometimes, tasting without swallowing. There is a tendency in him not to call a man a poet unless he has been baptised. He took literature as a part of the Church Service. It is because of this moralistic note in his critical writings that Sir Walter Raleigh disliked him. This moralistic tendency in Arnold made Mr. Eliot compare him with F. H. Bradley. In fact a whole book has been written on this aspect of his critical writings.[4] Mr. Vincent Buckley brackets him with Mr. T. S. Eliot and Dr. F. R. Leavis and studies their critical works in his book called *Poetry and Morality*. Mr. John Halloway includes Matthew Arnold in his book known as *The Victorian Sages*. All this makes it evident that he *was* too much of a moralist. Poetry of revolt against moral ideas was a poetry, for him, of revolt against life. All this seriously offends modern taste.

Then Matthew Arnold was not a great scholar, and much less a linguist. He built his critical house on the bricks of ignorance and wanted to support it on the mortar of assumption. Professor Saintsbury deplores his lamentable ignorance. Placed against Dr. Johnson or Coleridge, he was unlearned. He once confessed himself that he lacked "intellectual robustness." He embarks upon criticising authors and languages which he does not understand. His *The Study of Celtic Literature* remains, over all, a useless and stupid performance. Yet, though he knew little of French and Russian languages, he could talk quite authentically about Amiel or Tolstoy.

His critical methods are also very doubtful. He made a lot of fuss about *disinterestedness*, but it is doubtful if he himself was ever a disinterested critic. He had his own prejudices. His cult of classicism—or, as Professor Saintsbury calls it, neo-tato-classicism—marred much of his critical writings. His dislike of the romantic in literature was as much unjustified as the Romantics' dislike of the classical principles. Arnold was sometimes very dogmatic, and his obsession with high seriousness makes him so dogmatic a critic : he excluded Chaucer from among the classics and called Shelley an ineffectual angel. His method of criticism—the touchstone method—itself is not at all flawless.

This method consists in selling poetry by the pound. This method may be seen in its most eloborate employment in his essay upon *The Study of Poetry*. There he takes a line of Chaucer, and—rather unfairly, but not meaning to be unfair—two lines of Milton. He likes Chaucer's line (as you knew he would) the best of all—that might proceed from the circumstances that he misquotes it. But no ! That you may not doubt his perfect impartiality, he misquotes all these authors.

Then, his manifest dislike of the historical method in criticism, for which it is difficult to suggest an excuse. It is true that too much emphasis on the historical elements tends to make criticism dull and pedantic. But it is also true that all values, literary and moral, are relative and the factor of time cannot so easily be ignored. This is what Matthew Arnold never understood. He openly declared that historical method is not reliable. He knew very little of the history of literature, and he liked to think that great poetry drops from the skies. Arnold lacked an adequate sense of the places originally occupied by old things and by things in foreign lands. He would group together lines from Homer, Chaucer, Milton, because they had in common a capacity to make a singular impression on Matthew Arnold in the nineteenth century. Outside the nineteenth century, the time factor did not simply exist for him. It is a little surprising to see how a man like him who was greatly influenced by his times should have ignored the time factor almost outrightly.

Further, Matthew Arnold was an egotist, and egoism is something that hardly makes for good criticism. There is always a strong presence in his essays. "His way of writing compels attention, but that attention is directed, not on his object but on himself and his object together. In the essay on Amiel he stands like an unyielding rock washed round by the waves of Amiel. His essays are monologues. We cannot imagine him employing, as Dryden did, the dialogue form. Arnold's egotism accounts for the high-pitched conversational tone, the ripple of inspired extemporisation. It all makes away from criticism because you

cannot show off and be disinterested at the same time." He was a good salesman and was always trying to show-off. His criticism is tainted with a certain snobbery and even dandyism.

There is much of disparity between his practice and theory. He pleads disinterestedness, but is himself a highly interested critic. But all these defects are overshadowed by a very real quality in him—he did believe in the best, and he did know that it was not the shoddy. Most of us do not. He did, and that may be our parting salute to him. We may conclude with Professor Saintsbury's remark—"Arnold had not the sublime and inspired inconsistency of Dryden. He had not robustness of Johnson; the supreme critical reason of Coleridge; scarcely the exquisite, if fitful, appreciation of Lamb; or the full-blooded and passionate appreciation of Hazlitt, but he had an exacter knowledge than Dryden's, the fineness of his judgments shows finer beside Johnson's bluntness; he could not woolgather like Coleridge; his range was far wider than Lamb's; his scholarship and his delicacy alike gave him an advantage over Hazlitt. Systematic without being hide-bound; well read without pedantry; delicate and subtle without weakness ; Catholic without eclecticism, enthusiastic without indiscriminateness—Matthew Arnold is one of the best aud most precious of critics."

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CHAPTER VI

MATTHEW ARNOLD'S PROSE STYLE

It is possible to dislike Arnold as a critic; but it is impossibe not to be attracted by his fine prose style. Arnold was not as conscious a stylist as Pater or Flaubert. But he gave to English prose what it lacked. In one of his critical essays called *The Literary Influence of Academies* he points out the defects of the English genius and says that the English writers are honest but not exact. Even their finest achievement, their poetry, is deficient in the things which the French can give in abundance—for example, form, method, precision, proportion, arrangement. He further says that in prose, where such things are all important, the English lag behind the French. His own style is free from these defects, and his claim to permanence is perhaps as much due to his charming style as to his critical theories.

Professor H. W. Garrod points out that his real distinction lies in his prose-style which is extremely enjoyable. "I enjoy above all things", he says, "Matthew Arnold's beautiful English having both grace and truth. Grace and truth are qualities rare, I suppose, in any age."

In his article which we have already referred to, he analyses the prose style of J. H. Newman and A. W. Kinglake. He accuses Newman of provincialism. Kinglake, he says, writes Corinthian style which is inferior not only to Attic but also to Asiatic. Macaulay's prose is also, according to Arnold, Corinthian. He was aware of these things and he wanted to redeem order, precision and exactness back to English prose. Mr. H. Paul and Professor H. W. Garrod speak very highly of his prose style. Mr. Paul declares, "Not to have read it (*Essays in Criticism*) is to be ignorant of a great intellectual event".

Let us now analyse the sources and technique of his style. Matthew Arnold had a manner and a style rather new to England. It was perfectly adapted to the art of criticism. His style is directly opposite of Macaulay's in which, it has been said, it is difficult to tell the truth. It is not a beaded style whose thoughts are lost in its garniture. It has gusto and glitter, but not much of that—not so much as to defeat its own purpose. It is a style of *line* rather than that of *colour*. Arnold cares for words, but words are not to be found in his prose simply for a show-off. The love of words is not an obsession with him, as it was with Pater.

Matthew Arnold was influenced by the French prose-authors, especially Sainte Beauve, and Renan. At home he was most influenced by the *Bible*. "He was", says Professor Oliver Elton, "most of all affected by the *Bible*; and the forces which made him, if they can be named in order of their importance, I take to be first of all, the *Bible* and Wordsworth, and next to these, the Greeks and Goethe". He was also influenced by Addison whose clear, precise sentences have not often been surpassed. His style is, in a way, Addisonian.

But it should be remembered that the charm of his style is all his own. The flowers may be of other men's gardens, but their culling is his own. Professor George Saintsbury maintains that his style cannot be assigned to any single original being. It is a "sort of compound or eclectic outcome of the old Oxford academic style, as it may be seen at times in Newman, of French perriflage, and of some elements peculiar to Mr. Arnold himself.

The distinctive merits of Arnold's prose-style can be studied under various heads : (1)*Lucidity and clarity* (2) *His delicacy of touch* (3) *His poetic quality* (4) *Symmetry and Proportion* and (5) *Use of striking epithets and quotations*. Now, let us study them one by one.

Lucidity and Clarity—Matthew Arnold's prose is transparent and crystal clear like a limpid stream. Arnold shows commendable skill in sifting the material at his

disposal. In his essays on Keats and Gray, for example, he is straightforward, and shows insight and deep understanding of his subject. This is present in almost all his works. His diction and rhythm add to his lucidity. He is always clear and lucid and straightforward, and says what he means without any circumlocution :

"Culture seeks to do away with classes and sects : to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere."

"The substance and manner of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness."

In the last quotation the position of the most important words—*truth* and *seriousness*—should be noted.

His refined elegance and delicacy of touch—Suavity and serenity are the dominating notes in Arnold's poetry. But these pervade his prose no less. A. C. Rickett says, "Arnold is always in kid-gloves and kid-gloves are not exciting adornment for a poet, there is much to be said for the kid-glove in criticism." Arnold is never loud or violent. His irony is never bitter—it reminds us of Addison rather than of Dean Swift, or, if we are to limit ourselves to literary criticism, of Dr. Johnson. His oft-quoted remark about Shelley is an instance. He criticizes Shelley; but calls him nevertheless an "angel". His criticism of Wordsworthians in his essay on Wordsworth is a fine example of delicate irony—sometimes even inverted irony.

His Poetic Quality—"It would do wrong," says Oliver Elton, "to Matthew Arnold to sever his prose which is so often that of a poet, from his verse into which the thought and temper of his prose continually find their way". His remark about Shelley is an example of poetic-prose : "beautiful and ineffectual angel beating his luminous wings in the void in vain." Few passages of English prose are more memorable than Matthew Arnold's glowing tribute to Oxford which he calls the "home of lost causes, and forsaken beliefs, and unpopular names, and impossible

loyalties." But this happens occasionally only. Arnold generally does not write polyphonic prose nor has he any obsessions with rhythmic and musical words, as Pater and Symons had. Normally he is clear and *prosaic*, but he is capable of being poetic and rhetoric.

Use of Quotations and Epithets—Arnold was not good at definitions. But he showed skill in coining new and striking epithets. Some of his phrases have become platitudes—sweetness and light, Amphictyonic court, the best that has been thought and said in the world, Philistinism and Anglo-Saxon, etc. He was so good at writing phrases that he attracted his public immediately. But sometimes it becomes an obsession with him and he repeats his self-coined phrases to excess—nay ! to boredom. His use of quotations is no less remarkable. He can quote from Homer, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Chaucer, Burns, Heine and Goethe and a thousand others. His quotations always serve a purpose, and they are not mere adhesives or luxuriants—a defect which is so common in the essays of Hazlitt.

Symmetry, proportion, etc.—Arnold was a classicist and he believed in the classical principles of symmetry and harmony :—

> The truth in Hellas seen so plain
> The art of art is to restrain.

His clauses are often based on the Greek and Latin principles of sentence-structure—antithesis, balance and counterbalance. For a prose as that of Arnold equally characterized by symmetry and proportion and harmony, we are driven to French literature or to ancient Greece. His prose style has the Attic stamp of purity, chastity, lucidity and balance, symmetry, precision and proportion.

Matthew Arnold's style is marked by all these qualities and many more. But it would be a positive mistake to suppose that it is entirely flawless. His style has its own defects, as it has its own virtues. The most striking defects of a style arise out of the temperament of its author. Arnold was, to begin with, an egsoist. And his style has all the defects and mannerisms of the style of an egoist. There is always a

strong presence in his essays. His way of writing compels attention, but that attention is directed not on his object but on himself and his object together. In the essays on Amiel he stands like an unyielding rock washed round by the waves of Amiel. His essays are monologues.

His style, it has been suggested, lacks masculinity. A he-man of literature does not write like him. But this charge cannot hold water since his so-called feminity adds a peculiar charm to his style which is so remarkable in spite of its urbane, civilized and rather tender tone.

The most glaring defect of Arnold's prose style is his habit of repetition—he is fond of certain words and phrases and he repeats them almost to boredom :—

"An organ like the Remedes Deuxmondes, having for its main functions to understand and utter the best that is known and thought in the world, existing, it may be said, as just an organ for the free-play of the mind, we have not; but we have the *Edinburgh Review* existing as an organ of the old Whigs, and for as much play of the mind as may suit its being that; we have the *Quarterly Review*, existing as an organ of the Tories, and for as much play of the mind as may suit its being that; we have the *British Quarterly Review*, existing as an organ of the political Dissenters, and for as much play of the mind as may suit its being that..........."

Mr. Paul rightly says, "It would have been well if Arnold had applied the critical pruning knife to the exuberant mannerisms which sometimes disfigure his style".

CHAPTER VII

ARNOLD'S CRITIQUE OF ROMANTIC POETS

It is strange that Matthew Arnold, who follows the romantic tradition in his own poetry, fails to appreciate the poetry of Romantics. His attitude towards Romanticism is revealed in his essays on Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats. He preferred Shelley's letters to his poetry; he thought Byron a better poet than either Shelley or Keats or Coleridge. He, however, lavished much praise on Wordsworth, because in him he could find that moral profundity and powerful application of ideas to life, which he considers to be the essentials of great poetry.

Professor Saintsbury describes Arnold as imperfectly Romantic or even anti-Romantic. Professor Foakes asserts that the Romantic elements gain the upperhand in Matthew Arnold. His disintegrated vision and his nostalgia fall contrary to the doctrines preached by the apostle of classicism. In his heart of hearts, the poor man, standing between two worlds, was a romantic. According to J. N. D. Bush he can best be described as a mixture of Keats and Hardy. He wanted to bring classical virtues back to England; but he succeeded only in establishing negative virtues. He wanted that all poetry should be a criticism of life; though his own poetry is nothing better than a rejection of life. Thus, at his best, Arnold can be described as an anti-romantic romantic.

Wordsworth, according to Arnold, is one of the very chief glories of English Poetry. "Wordsworth's poetry is great because of the extraordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties; and because of the extraordinary power with which, in case after case, he shows us this joy, and renders it so as to make us

share it. It has moral profundity. 'A large sense is, of course, to be given to term *moral*. Whatever bears upon the question, "how to live," comes under it.' Arnold, having occupied this position, attacks the current doctrine of art for art's sake. "A poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against *life*; a poetry of indifference towards moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards *life*.' It is not surprising that this passage should be one of those into which Arnold introduces his description of poetry as a criticism of life. "Where, then, is Wordsworth's superiority? It is here; he deals with more of *life* than they do; he deals with life, as a whole, more powerfully."

Matthew Arnold himself was a Wordsworthian and, therefore, he overshot in praise of Wordsworth. For Byron too, he had a great admiration. Byron and Wordsworth, by their actual performances . and despite the likelihood that Keats possessed a richer natural endowment than either of them, were the pre-eminent English poets of their century. Arnold appreciated Byron because, he thought, Byron had thrown himself into a desperate battle with Philistinism. He was a 'passionate and dauntless soldier of a forlorn hope, who, ignorant of the future and unconsoled by its promises, nevertheless waged against the conservation of the old impossible world so fiery battle; waged it till he fell,—waged it with such splendid and imperishable excellence of sincerity and strength.' Byron had haunted Arnold's youth, helped shape his poetry, put before him the problems of sexual conduct, symbolised passion and action, and then had come, for a time, to seem merely vulgar. Again and again, Arnold revised his opinion : but his last was praise. It is significant that, however severely Arnold holds Keats and Shelley to account for their sexual lives, he is perfectly indifferent to Byron's. He admits that Keats is really a man of iron, but not until he had said severe and snobbish word about his affair with Fanny Browne. The same is the case with his judgment of Shelley's character. But of Byron's sexuality he says nothing.

Arnold, however, does singular honour to Keats's poetry. He believes Keats 'to have been by his promise, at any rate, if not fully by his performance, one of the very

greatest of English poets.' This conviction is based not only upon the poetry but also upon a knowledge of its author. Keats, Arnold holds, was not the sensuous weakling as he is generally supposed to be. There was 'flint and iron in him.' Had he been granted more time, Arnold believed, he might have developed greatly; he might have added 'moral profundity' to his 'natural magic.' On account of this 'natural magic', Arnold ranks Keats with Shakespeare, and says : "No one else in English poetry, save Shakespeare, has in expression quite the fascinating felicity of Keats, his perfection of loveliness. "I think," he said humbly, "I shall be among the English poets after my death." He is; he is with Shakespeare."—

So far as Arnold's judgments regarding the poetry of Wordsworth, Byron, and Keats are concerned, he can be tolerated; but, his critique of Shelley's poetry has become notoriously provoking. He regarded Shelley as a "beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain." He found that Shelley's poetry had little criticism of life or none; it was vague and unsubstantial; it lacked architectonic power. Thanks to Karl Grabo and Sault who have proved it beyond doubt that Shelley had a well-ordered philosophy of life and that his poetry was full of substance and of human interest, for he was a revolutionary who wanted to reconstruct society according to his heart's desire. Shelley did keep a touch with humanity and worried as much about its fate as the author of *Sohrab and Rustam* and *Dover Beach*. In fact, Shelley must be recognised not only as an artist who conjures up before our imagination a visionary realm of beauty but also as an independent thinker who can create, out of material derived from contemporary movements, a world of ideas with a value and significance all its own. Alfred Noyes has appealed to revise the erroneous views about Shelley's poetry since the angel which Arnold speaks of is very effectual. And, to quote Professor Saintsbury, 'Shelley's worst utterance is better worth-reading than the best panegyric of his commentators.' There is in Shelley's poetry a tougher criticism of life than in Arnold, and in any case it is more balanced than that of the latter.

CHAPTER VIII

MATTHEW ARNOLD : THEORY OF POETRY

The definition of a thing is the first and the last thing that you can say about it. Most of the definitions are *exclusive*. That is why people do not take very kindly to definitions in general. What is beauty ? What is literature ? These are some of the questions which can never be adequately answered. To confine ourselves to literature alone, take any definition of literature you like, and you will find it easier to disagree with it than to agree with it. "Literature is the mirror of society"—yes, but what about 'pure poet' ? Or, to restrict our province, take one single literature term, say romanticism. 'Romanticism is egoism in literature'—mostly it is, but what about Coleridge ? 'Romanticism is liberalism in literature,—yes sometimes it is, but what about Sir Walter Scott who preserved till death the wine-glass in which he drank with the king ? The list can be multiplied *ad infinitum*, but is likely to serve no useful purpose.

The case with poetry is not different either. 'Poetry is philosophy set to music.' What music there is in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, or what was Swinburne's philosophy ? This also has been the fate of Matthew Arnold's definition of poetry. Leslie Stephens, one of the admirers of Matthew Arnold, guessed the danger and contended that it was not definition but an epigram. But it does not serve any useful purpose, for it remains a definition after all.

But, before we actually proceed to find loopholes in Arnold's definition of poetry, let us first see what it means. It is always difficult to see what an author means ; and always easy to take him to task, mostly for what he does not. Arnold's definition can best be understood after properly understanding the circumstances that gave rise

to it. Arnold reacted against the romantic conception of spontaneous art. He was an apostle of classicism. He came out saying, as it were—"Look here, we have had enough of romantic ideas and thoughts ; enough of sentimental glorification of the soul of the individual. But man cannot feed on pigeons' milk alone, life is much more complex than that. Let us be more concrete, you can't always fly in the air. That is what I mean." The romantics had laid emphasis on *a priori* ideas, thoughts and emotions were more than enough for them. They believed in *poetic moment*, the poetic subject was a secondary thing for them. Arnold got rid of this. He said that it was time to be more substantial, to bind our poetry to earth, to be more concrete and less airy.

"Poetry," according to Matthew Arnold, then, "is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the law of poetic truth and beauty". And this he interprets as the application of ideas—grand ideas—to life. Mere life—though it is a very splendid thing—cannot give us poetry ; and more ideas overshoot the mark and tend to build castles in the air. Where are the ideas to be applied ? What are the objects of the poetry ? Arnold replies, "They are actions, human actions possessing an inherent interest in themselves and which are to be communicated in an interesting manner by the art of the poet." To the next question that what are the most important objects, he answers : "Those certainly which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections. To those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race and which are independent of time." The very use of the word *action* suggests something Aristotelian. For Aristotle the action was the most important thing. Arnold also says, "All depends upon the subject. Choose a fitting action, penetrate yourself with the feeling of its situations ; this done everything else will follow."

Connected with these dicta that constitute his theory of poetry, is the problem of morality. The actions that have an inherent interest in themselves, he would have said, are primarily moral. For him ideas meant moral

ideas ; and an application of ideas, a profound application of moral ideas to life. He says, "If what distinguishes the greatest poets in their powerful and profound application of ideas to life, which surely no good critic will deny, then to prefix to the term ideas here the term moral makes hardly any difference, because human life itself is in so preponderating a degree moral."

This, put in its barest minimum, is Matthew Arnold's theory of poetry. There are certain other side issues, certain corollaries ; and we will discuss them as we proceed. Put rather mathematically the points in Arnold's theory of poetry are : (1) Poetry is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, and criticism of life means application of ideas—moral ideas—to life, (2) The most excellent objects of poetry are : human actions possessing an inherent interest in themselves, and (3) Subject is more important than anything else. Now, let us critically examine his theory of poetry, and see what others have to say about it.

The main objection against his theory of poetry is that he lays too much emphasis on the *subject*. Critics point out that it is not the *subject* that matters but the *treatment*. The charge is substantial, and the Arnoldians have not been able to answer it. Arnold had a fitting subject in his *Merope*, yet it is a failure both as poetry and as drama, whereas Boileau wrote a fine, nice poem on the desk, Burns a fine little song on the mouse, Chesterton a delightful lyric on the donkey, and so on. It is the treatment that matters, it will have to be agreed upon. "The real world is brazen, only the poets deliver a golden," said Sir Sidney ; and no subject is too unpoetic for a really good poet. He transforms everything that seems to be unpoetic, dull or ugly into something essentially beautiful, smelling like rose and shining like gold.

Then we have Professor George Saintsbury's objection that in confining poetry merely to human actions, Arnold deprives poetry of half her realm. Professor Saintsbury suggests that the objects of poetry are not merely actions

but also thoughts and feelings. One does not quite see how human actions are separable from human thoughts and feelings. "Thoughts and feelings apart from action that prompt them might be the creed of a few brooding Hamlet-like poets, but they had no charm for Arnold." The objection can be replied to from another point-of-view also. We cannot know the thoughts of a man unless they are expressed, and expression involves action. A thing *is*, psychologists point out, what it *does*. Tess is what Tess does ; Emma, what she does. So, this objection of Saihtsbury is not very substantial, and falls down to pieces on a critical examination.

Saintsbury further objects that Matthew Arnold's definition of poetry is too wide. It is according to him a philosophical definition. Prose, fiction and drama, he says, may be criticism of life but certainly not poetry which is the art of life. What a queer objection ! If the term *criticism of life* is too wide, what are we to say of *the art of life* ? Further, never mind if other branches of literature also offer a criticism of life. We are concerned with poetry. Arnold's definition of poetry, which we have already quoted, does contain the terms that specify his province—*poetic truth* and *poetic beauty*. Poetry offers the criticism of life under the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty.

What are those laws ?—is Saintsbury's next objection. The only answer to this objection is—they are what they are, and there is no need of mentioning it in the abstract. They are, to quote Arnold's own words, far better recognized by being felt in the verse of the master, than by being pursued in the prose of critic. Arnold had no love for sweeping generalizations—a trade in which Professor Saintsbury specialized.

The greatest objection against his theory of poetry is that he lays too much emphasis on the moral side of poetry :

> "A poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against life ; a poetry of indifference to

moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards life."

and :

"It is important, therefore, to hold fast to this : that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life ; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life,—to the question : How to live ?"

It has been said that Arnold treats poetry as a part of the Church Service, and that he thinks too much of the use of literature, and too little of its pleasures. There is a tendency in him to call no man a poet till he has been baptised and confirmed.

But all this fuss about the moralistic tendency in Arnold seems to be an exaggeration at times. He emphasises the fact that poetry should deal with the moral problems because he considers life to be moral in a preponderating degree, but he gives a much wider meaning to the term *moral* than it has been supposed by those who are against him :

"Morals are often treated in a narrow and fake fashion, they are bound up with systems of thought and beliefs which have had their day ; they are fallen into the hands of pedants and professional dealers ; they grow tiresome to some of us."

and :

"A large sense is of course to be given to the term *moral*. Whatever bears upon the question "how to live" comes under it".

Further, he is himself against didactic poetry, and considers it to be the lowest kind of poetry. In his essay on Wordworth he quotes Voltaire and points out that by "treating in poetry moral ideas," he does not mean writing didactic poem. Arnold says :

"Some kinds of poetry are in themselves lower kinds than others, the balled kind is a lower kind ; the didactic kind, still more is a lower kind."

But there is still another objection. Arnold defines poetry after examining its highest manifestation, and that is a fallacy. What we mean can be best understood by way of a theological analogy ; God is the highest manifestation of human soul, and, therefore, all men are like God. But no, there *are* certain human beings on this planet that have nothing of the divine spark in them. Yet they go by that name. All great poetry, similarly, is a criticism of life, but there is much poetry that is not a criticism of life, and you can't deny the name of poetry to it. It is good if a poet offers us a sound criticism of life, but we must be prepared to listen those also who cannot. Poetry should be the criticism of life, if it is to be great poetry. But if it is not that, it does not cease to be poetry. This is a substantial objection, and the Arnoldians will not be able to answer it, we are sure, very satisfactorily.

CHAPTER IX

MATTHEW ARNOLD,—PLACE POSITION AND INFLUENCE

Replying to a friend who evidently disliked Matthew Arnold, Gerald Manely Hopkins said : "I do not like your calling Matthew Arnold Mr. Kidglove Cocksure. I have more reason than you for disagreeing with him and thinking him very wrong, but nevertheless I am sure he is a rare genius and a great critic. Yes, in spite of all his limitations Arnold is a great critic and stands as a colossus in the history of English criticism. He has been acclaimed as the Aristotle of the nineteenth century. For half a century he exercised a tremendous influence upon English criticism and was blindly trusted by his votaries. Before him English criticism was in a state of chaos ; he made it coherent and logical. What he did and what every other English critic before him had missed doing, was, as Sir Quiller-Couch puts it, "to treat criticism as a deliberate disinterested art, with laws and methods of its own, a proper temper, and certain standards and touchstones of right taste by which the quality of any writing as literature can be tested and to lay down these lines at a moment when the practitioners of criticism most needed them "

Arnold's chief merit as a critic lies in the fact that he did not merely criticise books himself; he taught others how to criticise them. Herbert Paul Is quite justified when he remarks that 'nobody after reading *Essays in Criticism* has any excuse for not being a critic.' He set people talking about "the grand style," "high seriousness", "sweetness and light", "the best that is known and thought in the world," etc. He spread among them a genuine desire for the best and pierced through the armour of self-sufficiency and provinciality in criticism. From first to the last, he adhered to

the cosmopolitan view of criticism and emphasized that criticism was primarily concerned with the task of learning and propagating the best that is known and thought in the world—the best not from the standpoint of a personal estimate, or from that of the historical estimate, but from the standpoint of genuine intrinsic excellence, unprejudiced by considerations of personal likes and dislikes or by those of time and place.

"I wish," Arnold said, "to decide nothing as of my own authority ; the great art of criticism is to get oneself out of the way and to let humanity decide." His criticism advocates by precept as well as by example the wide and luminous view of his great master, Goethe, and is, thus, a noble antidote to parochialism. That is the reason why even as rigid a critic as Saintsbury rates him very high in general critical quality and accomplishment. He remarks, "I am not myself, by any means, in general agreement—I am often in very particular disagreement—with Mr. Arnold's critical canons and less often with his individual judgement. But as I look back over European criticism for the years (approaching a century) which have passed since his birth I cannot find one critic, born since that time who can be ranked above or even with him in general critical quality and accomplishment."

What were the causes of Arnold's great success as a critic? First of all, Arnold possessed a biographical talent nicely suited to critical purpose, and a good classical equipment as a critic of life. He held that literature was a criticism of life. Therefore, a critic of literature must be a critic both of life and literature. In part he had learnt this talent from Doctor Johnson and in a large part from Sainte-Beauve and Goethe. The Greek masters like Sophocles had taught him how to see life steadily and see it whole. On the whole his outfit as a critic of literature and life was thorough, although, now and then, he missed his mark, as in the case of Shelley, and sometimes perhaps overshot it, as in the case of Wordsworth. This combination of biography and criticism made Arnold a really enjoyable critic of literature and saved him from being colourless and rigidly scientific.

Secondly, Arnold treated criticism as much a creative art as poetry. He wanted to save it from dry rationalism and mere intellectual gymnastic; he wanted to make criticism brilliant and imaginative. Trilling aptly remarks, "His criticism is the reconciliation of the two tradtions whose warfare had so disturbed his youth—rationalism and faith." Few critics have been so thoroughly original and fewer still have had so large a share of the 'daemonic faculty' which awakens intelligent enthusiasm in others. Arnold tried to bridge the gulf between feeling and intellect, between imagination and reason, between head and heart, and between poetry and science. In this respect he may be called an innovator.

Thirdly, Arnold's real distinction and the best hope for him of a permanent fame in criticism is that he is so extraordinarily enjoyable. He is enjoyable mainly because of his temper and personality and his fine prose style. Professor Garrod remarks : "I enjoy above all things MatthewArnold's beauitiful English having both grace and truth. Grace and truth are qualities rare, I suppose, in any age. Our own age wants grace perhaps more than truth. We have a kind of ugly truthfulness. But we too little esteem grace—and we have ceased to read Matthew Arnold."

Fourthly, like Aristotle and Coleridge, Arnold had a gift for penetrating into the object (to use the terms Arnold liked), for losing himself in finding the content of written words and of the mind behind them. He is so good a critic that he can make us feel that the object of criticism is itself speaking with his words, saying,'This is my nature:my"secret for better or worse, is out.' In the Homer lectures his power of perception is pinned down by an eleborate pattern of hard thinking. His power of penetration. working with a remarkable power of archítectonic is the power of all good critics, and Arnold takes his place with perfect ease among them.

Readers generally allege that Arnold tries to measure poetry by an arbitrary external standard. His method has been humorously called by Professor Garrod as 'selling poetry by the pound.' But to do so is to forget Arnold's steady insistence that criticism is essentially the exercise of curiosity and that the really valuable judgment forms itself almost insensibly in the course of an attempt 'to see the

object as in itself it really is.' When Arnold recommends the use of touchstone-quotations, he is simply suggesting that readers can, by reminding themselves of poetry which has moved them at this level in the past, help themselves to a more secure judgment of that which actually confronts them. Towards the end of his *Practical Criticism*, Dr. I. A. Richards describes a technique for ascertaining whether the feelings excited by a poem do or do not come from a deep source in our experience.' Arnold recommends touchstone-quotations for precisely this purpose. Is it not likely that most readers would find the use of these simple, more natural, and more effective than Dr. Richard's formal drill?

It has been said that Arnold's strong conception of morality vitiated his literary judgement ; that he laid too much emphasis on moral profundity at the expense of the aesthetic side of poetry. Thus, Professor Garrod remarks that 'I admit a tendency in Matthew Arnold to call no man a poet until he has been baptised and confirmed.' Walter Raleigh thought that in the hands of Matthew Arnold criticism of literature was being treated as though it were a part of the Church Service. To show the moralistic and priestly elements in Arnold's criticism they generally quote from his Essay on Wordsworth where he says : ' a poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against *Life*; a poetry of indifference towards moral ideas is poetry of indifference towards *life*." It is, however, to be remembered that Arnold had no narrow conception of morality; it was to him almost as wide as life itself. So that poetry which ignored moral ideas was in his eyes false to human life. When he said that poetry must deal with moral ideas, he didn't mean, as is so often erroneously imagined, that it should be didactic or given to preaching. He himself makes the point clear. "If it is said that to call these ideas *moral* ideas is to introduce a strong and injurious limitation, I answer that it is to do nothing of the kind, because moral ideas are really to remain a part of human life.The question, *how to live* is itself a moral idea; and it is the question which most interests every man, and with which in some way or other, he is perpetually occupied.

A large sense is of course to be given to the term *moral*. Whatever bears upon the question "how to live," comes under it.

In fact, Arnold speaks of didactic poetry always in a vein of contempt. In his essay *The Study of Poetry*, for example, he writes :—

> "Some kinds of poetry are in themselves lower kinds than others. The ballad kind is a lower kind; the didactic kind still more is a lower kind."

He dismisses certain passages of Burns as unpoetical saying that in them the poet is more or less preaching and not speaking from the innermost depth of his soul. Similarly he condemns those who say that Wordsworth's "Ethical system is as distinctive and capable of exposition as Bishop Butler's." Even in the face of such conclusive evidence, critics persist in accusing Arnold of ethical bias in his estimate of poets and poetry; but the critics are wonderful beings and their ways past finding out.

Geoffery Tillotson defends Arnold on the ground that when he spoke of literature, he spoke as he did because the middle class were in power. Like his audience, Arnold was interested in practical morality and 'in offering the middle class the beautiful high-serious poetry of the world he offered it not as the rival of their Hebraic male religion but as its queenly compliment.' Poetry was religious too. If consolation and joy were the products of religion, they were also the products of poetry. Authentic poetry was solemn as Church. And so Arnold had to rule out Chaucer, and with him all poets lacking 'high-seriousness,' from among the greatest, the religious, 'the glorious class of the best.'

"Distinguished as is, Arnold's achievement in the best of his criticisms of particular works and particular authors, it is probably less important than his achievement as a spokesman for criticism itself, as a champion of literary culture. *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* is both the classical apologia for the role which

Arnold himself sustained with such effect and the classical statement of the liberal principle which ideally should guide its performance. *The Literary Influence of Acdemies* is a persuasive reminder of the authority of standards of criticism."

Mention must also be made of the lucid, exquisite and rhythmical style of Matthew Arnold. His style has the qualities of regularity, uniformity, precision, and balance. It has elegance, wit, irony, and urbanity. "His prose at its best has the lucid gleam of the morning dew and the liquid clearness of the limped stream that runs glittering in open sunshine. No eddies, no whirlpools, no froth, no foam, its pace is tranquil and yet cheerful, bright and free.'' "In his various prose-writings", says Jump, "it is above all Arnold's sanity, his clear sense of things as they are, which is impressive. None of the other Victorian prophets with whom he is sometimes bracketed can claim this quality in anything like the same degree. Beside him, Carlyle looks grotesquely prejudiced, Ruskin febrile and unbalanced, Morris irresponsibly escapist. Even Mill, despite the saintliness of his rationalism, looks like the victim of a system."

In the end we can do no better than summing up Arnold's position as a critic in the words of Professor Saintsbury :

"Arnold had not the sublime and new inspired inconsistency of Dryden. He had not the robustness of Johnson ; the supreme critical reason of Coleridge ; scarcely the exquisite, if fitful, appreciation of Lamb, or the full-blooded and passionate appreciation of Hazlitt, but he had an exacter knowledge than Dryden's ; the fineness of his judgement shows finer beside Johnson's bluntness; he couldn't wool-gather like Coleridge; his range was far wider than Lamb's; his scholarship and his delicacy alike gave him an advantage over Hazlitt. Systematic without being hide-bound; well read without pedantry; delicate and subtle, without weakness, catholic without eclecticism, enthusiastic without indiscriminate-

ness,—Matthew Arnold is one of the best and most precious of critics."

The influence of Arnold was widespread and he left behind a number of followers in English Criticism. Professor H. W. Garrod is a devout supporter of Arnold even today and he does not need any excuse for being so. He has a number of other supporters too. Lionel Trilling remarks that Arnold was one of the most influential critics of his age. He formed a pattern of criticism which was convincing. Other critics may have been momentarily more exciting; none was eventually more exciting; none was eventually more convincing." T. S. Eliot, in spite of a little scoffing at the moralistic preaching of Matthew Arnold, goes to say that the academic literary opinions of our times were formed by Arnold. F. O. Matthiessen, Charles Whibley, A. C. Bradley, W. P. Ker, F. R. Leavis and Vincent Buckley are following the tradition started by Matthew Arnold. Even Walter Pater, Arthur Symons, J. A. Symonds and Leslie Stephens were influenced to a certain extent by the critical methods of Matthew Arnold. "For half a century," says R. A. Scott-James, "Arnold's position in England was comparable with that of Aristotle, in respect of the wide influence he exercised, the mark he impressed upon criticism and the blind faith with which he was trusted by his votaries." Criticism in England might be said to have started and ended with Matthew Arnold; before him there was a chaos, after him a multitudinous sea.

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Chapter X

A REASSESSMENT OF ARNOLD'S THEORY AND PRACTICE

Arnold aimed at teaching that great ideas should be applied to poetry. The application of great ideas to poetry is a philosophical aim. On the other hand, it can be maintained that a poet is not a mere philosopher and beauty of expression is in itself a great end; there may or may not be great ideas in poem. Great poets have been makers of music, and in their poetry there is a haunting melody which makes us forget the quality of their ideas. In lyrical poetry at least, great ideas do not count much, for lyrical poetry is built upon a few simple ideas. Saintsbury has severely criticised Arnold's theory of great ideas, saying that in fiction and drama great ideas may be necessary but not in poetry. But the point is contestable. In a reflective age poetry has to become philosophical. The age of Arnold was reflective, consequently Arnold is right in insisting upon the application of great ideas to poetry.

Arnold was, moreover, a teacher. The function of critic, according to Arnold, is to disseminate great ideas in society. The critic has to look for great ideas, find them in literature and popularise them. The Victorian age was, according to Arnold, a Philistine age; thus the duty of the poet was to teach the age the very best lessons of moral philosophy. Looking from this angle of vision the poetry produced by Arnold has to be a philosophical poetry—poetry full of great ideas. But the question is how can it be possible unless the literature be the storehouse of great ideas.

What is the exact nature of ideas worthy of being called great? Surely such ideas cannot be narrow and

particular. They should be general and broad, which have been tested by time and proved true to the human nature. On the other hand, such ideas which are for a period of time and are true to a particular class or country cannot have a universal appeal. The nature of Arnold's great ideas is thus universal, and the test of the greatness of such ideas is human experience (empirical) and not reasons (*a priori*), Experience and intuition play a greater part in finding out such ideas rather than book knowledge and logical reasoning from cause and effect. Such ideas are basic and ingrained in human nature hence their universality. They deal with right and wrong. We intuitionally know what is right from what is wrong, and here the experience of countless generations comes to guide us. Viewed from this angle, Arnold is a moralist.

The charge brought out by Saintsbury against Arnold's theory of great ideas may now be examined. According to Saintsbury, it is a truism to insist upon such moral ideas of a general nature as ideas of right and wrong, and all artistic productions unquestionably contain such ideas. Here Saintsbury is stating the case in favour of form as opposed to substance. According to Saintsbury, Arnold was insisting upon the poetic subject against poetic expression. Putting it in the language of criticism, the charge brought against Arnold is that of poetic subject as opposed to poetic moment. There can be poetry based upon inner harmony and music and beauty of expression, but the subject matter of such poetry need not be universal ideas, but only *a priori* ideas. The subject matter, thus, is of little importance, and the artistic treatment the same may be of the greater importance. This would make the poet a fine singer but not a great thinker. But a better view of things may be taken by treating great subjects in a highly poetic manner. The subject-matter of the poetical content may thus become as important as its poetical expression. This will be like a compromise. Arnold, like Ruskin, insisted upon the subject-matter, great-ideas, whereas the critics of Arnold insist more upon the form. But surely by his production Arnold showed that the he could combine the greatness of thought and the beauty of form.

The classical writers were all along insisting upon "great actions". Arnold himself withdrew the volume of poems containing *Empidocles of Etna*, just a few weeks after its publication, for the precise reason that there was little action in it. As a follower of the classical poets, it was but natural that Arnold should have insisted upon great ideas and their application. All classical poets are in a way moral thinkers. They deal with society. They see the abuses current in society and try to rectify those abuses. If Arnold called himself "an idle singer of an empty day", it was out of humility. The age was "empty" in his view, but he himself had a seriousness of purpose (high seriousness) which made him the very opposite of an idle singer. He had a message to deliver and was, like Carlyle, a prophet of the age; he was no idle singer. On the whole we may say that his aim was to combine philosophy with poetry and he succeeded in achieving his aim.

An analysis of his teachings reveals a body of moral ideas which he has stressed again and again. It may be said that some of these ideas are platitudes, but they are platitudes which should be repeated again and again. The reason that although intellectual people in general are not ignorant of such moral ideas, yet there are very few who follow them in the right spirit. Often the charge has been brought that Arnold is never tired of repeating himself, but it is moral earnestness of the poet who likes to remind the age of what it should do and what it should avoid doing :

> We do not what we ought,
> What we ought not we do.

These lines occur in his *Empedocles on Etna*, which contains many other ideas full of moral fervour. In a realistic manner Arnold accepts the world as it is, saying :—

> The world is what it is, for all our dust and din......

He complains that we want to make our own world, full of our conventions and thereby make ourselves unhappy :

> We mark not the world's courage but would have it
> take ours........

Further he complains that we spurn reason and invent a false course for the world and for ourselves. The curse of our ills can be found in a proper study of history of the world and in a truthful observation of a natural phenomenon. In this way we can discover the path of happiness. He is against mere book knowledge. The mass of volumes swell more and more out yet basic knowledge does not increase. The idea is repeated in a number of poems. In his poem *The Second Best* he says :—

Moderate tasks and moderate liesure,
Quiet living, strict-kept measure,
Both in suffering and pleasure in
'Tis for this thy nature years.
But so many books thou readest,
But so many schemes thou breedest,
But so many wishes feedest,
That thy poor head almost turns.

Here Arnold is in harmony with poets like Wordsworth and philosophers like Bergson. Wordsworth has taught the same lesson that books are not very necessary and has advocated the study of the books of the external nature. Bergson has stated the complexity of our age, admitting that books have created problems rather than solved them.

The chief lesson taught by Arnold is that of stoicism or uncomplaining endurance. It is an old philosophy and has come down to us from the set of Greek philosophers, known as Stoics. The same idea is taught by the cynics, in opposition to the Epicurians or the lovers of pleasures. The materialistic Victorian age with its "sick hurry and divided aims" was too much for Arnold. He, therefore, teaches the lasson of resignation.The age was dark and difficult, and such as would make a sensitive poet like Arnold pessimistic.The poem *Resignation* and *Stanzas in the Memory of the Author of Obermann*, fully illustrate the point. Stopford A. Brooke cosiders that Arnold had no right to colour us with his own melancholy. But a genesis of Arnold's melancholy proves that it was not personal but belonged to the age. Anyhow, personal or universal, Arnold's melancholy has steeped his poetry. But his message is full of courage. He is not sentimental, for he teaches

fortitude and courage in the face of adverse circumstances. We must not murmur or complain, rather we should work hard and leave the course of events to fate. Here it may be noted that Arnold was, more or less, a sceptic, although he believed in the immortality of soul, and also in the Absolute. Dogmatic Christianity did not convince him, and religious acceptation is bound to make a sensitive person pessimistic.

Among other lessons taught by him stress is laid upon obedience and loyalty. Here perhaps the memory of his father was a source of his inspiration. In his grand poem *Soharb and Rustam* he speaks of Sohrab's love for his unknown father in rather a personal tone. But the idea is repeated in many other poems. Filial obedience and loyalty are ingrained in human personality and Arnold has recognised this fact. In the *Sick King of Bokhara*, the lesson of loyalty and obedience is taught. The *Moolah* the impersonation of obedience to law, is praised for stern justice, and dies as a martyre to the cause. The king utters words of deep wisdom, saying that even rulers have themselves to be obedient to the law.

Arnold teaches the gospel of peace, particularly in *Balder Dead.*

> Something too much of war and broils which make
> Life one perpetual fight, a bath of blood
> Mine eyes are dizzy with arroway hail:
> My ears are stunned with blows, and sick for calm.

The moral of poem is that peace and calmness are necessary for life. Here Arnold anticipates the feelings of our generation after the end of the World War.

As a philosopher, Arnold believed in self-introspection, a teaching that has come from all great philosophers. The American poet Emerson says:

> The kingdom of God is within you.

Bergson believes in the unity of the spiritual life and insists upon intuition. Malebranche holds the view that "the divine order is graven in the heart of man, and he has but to retire into himself to learn it". The same views are

repeated by Arnold again and again. In his poem, *The Youth of Man*, he say,:

> Sink, O Youth, in thy soul
> Yearn to the greatness of nature
> Rally the good in the depth of thyself.

In another poem, *Self Dependence*, he says:

> Resolute to be thyself, and know that he
> Who finds himself, loses his misery.

Arnold as Classicist and Romantic : Metthew Arnold has insisted in his theory of poetry upon three main qualities: (1) Disinterestedness, (2) Objectivity, (3) Totality of impression or singleness of aim and object. All these qualities are to be found in classical poetry of ancient (1) Greece. By disinterestedness, Arnold means that the poet should choose his subject not from his own country or time. A subject in which the poet may be directly interested and about which he has prejudices and prepossessions cannot be a fit and proper subject. On the contrary a subject will be one upon which he can contemplate calmly and disinterestedly. Homer choose "The Wrath of Achilles" as a subject for *Iliad*, for it was a subject of mythological order and thus totally unconnected with the period in which Homer lived. (2) The classical poet could remain undisturbed and disinterested because, he was objective in his outlook. The more does a poet write of his own emotions, the more is he liable to commit errors of judgment. Subjective writing is a modern craze ; the ancients were objective in outlook. Moreover, it is the romantic who is more interested in his personal joys and sorrows for the classicist wanted to write of the joys or sorrows of other people, hence his tone was subdued. (3) The Greeks tried to choose a fit subject to give it a worthy utterance. The subject and the utterance are thus inter-dependent and inter-woven. For them, there were no "purple patches" and outstanding beautiful details. The result was a totality of impression which we do not find in later poets. The Greeks believed in singleness of the aim. On the contrary, even the greatest of the modern poets lacks this total impression. Shakespeare used too brilliant a style although the subject matter was often lost sight of.

Arnold's own practice was to a large extent at least, in conformity with the ancients. But it may be said that in spite of his attempts he could not be perfectly objective. His melancholy seems to have coloured his poetry, which is all grey. His stoicism became the very centre of his poetical thought. The industrial age which has made the intellectual contemporaries of Arnold gloomy, also left its deep trace on Arnold's mind. Thus he could not take himself away from his times. So we see that Arnold was a classicist only in a qualified way, and not completely. There is, no doubt, an intellectual element in his writings, both in prose and poetry-which proved that he was not swayed by emotion but was ruled by reason. Like a classicist, he kept in view the object that poetry was for society, not for the poet alone, Moreover in point of a style Arnold was a classicist whose tone was subdued and language polished. This was a Hellenic quality. We may call it the effect of sweetness and light, a suavity, a certain politeness born of the humanism and liberal education. This, however, does not mean that Arnold did not possess romantic elements.

A common charge against Arnold is that of melancholy The opinion of Stopford A. Brooke may be considered as a representative one Stopford A. Brooke says that Arnold has no business to be melancholy, and that he ought to have loved the whole movement of mankind. Even the noise and restlessness of it; he ought to have lost himself in love. But those who know the conditions of Arnold's times, will not agree with the opinion of Stopford A. Brooke, in spite of his being a brilliant critic. Arnold's age was such that an intellectual person could not help being melancholy. Not only Arnold but also Carlyle and Ruskin have expressed dissatisfaction with the age, Carlyle particularly in this "Past and Present". The failure of the French Revolution had ushered in an era of despair. There were further revolutions in 1830 and 1848, culminating in the *coup detate* of 1852, when monarchy was finally banished from France. Not only in France but also in Italy, Poland and even in England there was a wave of revolutions. In England, the Reform Bill of 1830 had its effects by the year 1848, when there were strikes and protests leading to the Chartist Movement.

Here we may remember that the first volume of Arnold's poems was published in 1849. In these circumstances Arnold could not remain unaffeced by the general wave of dissatisfaction and despair. His melancholy, therefore, was the melancholy of the age.

There was another movement afoot in the field of religon. It was the Oxford Movement, with Cardinal Newman as its guiding spirit. Newman published a number of pamphlets, called "Tacts of the Time." At this juncture', Arnold abandoned poetry and in 1855 published a pamphlet entitled "St. Paul and Protestantism." It is sad indeed, that Arnold the poet should have gone over to the side of pamphleteers, taking part in the religious disputes; but here we can see the sceptic and melancholy Arnold pleading the case of culture as opposed to religious dogmaticism. We may conclude that the Chartist agitation influenced Arnold as much as the political upheaval had done. The year 1855 saw the publication of the second volume of Arnold's poetry and found him as much melancholy and agitated as in 1849, when the first volume was published; but the mood of melancholy came to an end by 1867 when Europe was full of new hopes. Reforms had been carried out in England, and there was politically no turmoil in France, Italy and other countries. Thus the poems of Arnold written about 1867 and later are full of hope.

Arnold was idealist which is a condition of his being intellectual, and as such conscious of the shortcomings of his age. He had lamented that he was born in an age of transition, wandering between two ages, one dead and the other not yet born. This made him a pessimist, but his pessimism is that of his age. We can further trace his stoicism to be a consequence of his pessimisn, for he had learned the lesson of resignation, and it was an article of faith with him to bear the miseries of life. For this he brought example from the Greeks who were like him Stoics. Even in nature he read the lesson of uncomplaining endurance. But he was not without hope, and like a wise man of soul and not from commercial prosperity. Garrod has pointed out that Arnold was the greatest of the English elegiac poets and this further throws light upon Arnold's position. The elegiac note in

him came from his being a moralist, believing in poetry as a criticism of life, for he had shining moral ideals which sadly contrasted with life as he found around himself. But there is not depression in Arnold's poetry in spite of dissatisfaction and melancholy.

As a matter of principle, Arnold stood against the beauty of details, and the purple patches of the romantic poet which stand out prominently and, therefore, do not fall completely in the framework of the poem. His ideal was that of subordinating to and fusing the parts in the whole. But when we examine Arnold's own poetry, we find quite a number of such purple patches in it. The fact seems to be, as pointed out by Middleton Murray in his "Discoveries" that there was not one Arnold, there really were two Arnolds, one was the critic Arnold who was a classicist, the other the poet Arnold who was a romantic. The same opinion has been recorded by Cazamian, who further adds that Arnold was a romantic without being conscious of the fact. There is small wonder if we find passages of outstanding beauty in his poems, passages which are not as completely fusd within the framework of the poem as Arnold the critic would wish them to be. As Lucas remarks, there are two qualities to be found in Arnold's poetry. (1) Natural magic (2) Moral profundity. The element of moral profundity may be associated with his criticism of life, but natural magic also finds its way and is responsible for the beautiful lines of his poetry. There are some really unforgettable lines of Arnold that can be placed side by side with the best pieces of English romantic poetry.

1. . Time's current strong
 Leaves *us true to noting long.*
2. But each day brings it petty dust
 Our soon-chocked souls to fill,
 And we forget because we must,
 And not *because we will*
3. For them, for all, time's busy touch,
 While it *mends little, troubles* much,

4. Outlasts each effort, interest, hope,
Remorse, grief, joy :
....
....
This world in which we draw our breath,
In some sense, Fausta, outlasts death.

5. Alas, is even love too weak
To unlock the heart and let it speak.

6. A wanderer is man from his birth.

7. The same heart beats in every human breast.

8. The aids of noble life are all within.

9. I say; Fear not ! Life still
Leaves human effort scope,
But, since life tunes with ill,
Nurse no extravagant hope;
Because thou must not dream, thou need'st not then despair.

10. What will be for ever
What was from of old.
....
....
The day in his hotness,
The strife with the palm,
The night in her silence,

11. The stars in their calm.
Know, man hath all which Nature hath, but more,
And in that more lie all his hopes of good.

12. ......one thing only has been lent
To youth and age in common—discontent.

Let us freshly assess the position of Arnold as a poet. Bearing in mind that he was a social and literary critic, we find his poetry profoundly moral, and he comes before us with the deliberate intention to teach. The function of the poet may be different from that of the preacher and of the prophet, yet the poet may want to accelerate the consciousness of the reading people, and teach in a beautiful way withouht boring the reader. A transitional age is generally temperamentally full of cheerfulness, but the poet Arnold

appears to be a pessimist. But his melancholy is that of the age, and not of person. His grief is the grief of a thinker, and an idealist who experiences intellectual dissatisfaction at the affairs of things such as religious and political upheavals, progress of commerce, and decline of spiritual qualities—his own poetry being unworldly and spiritual. But Arnold is not only an idealist, he is also a realist. He tries to render things as they are so that he never divorces truth. As a contemporary of Darwin, Faraday and other notable scientists, Arnold was himself a man of scientific outlook. Even in his treatment of nature he is the least emotional of all the poets of nature. While Wordsworth is egoistic, Arnold is altruistic ; and while Byron is emotional, Arnold when sick and dissatisfied with life, is melancholy which is a romantic condition, and so much so that he has bęen called by Garrod the greatest elegiac poet in English language. It will not do just to consider him, as Middleton Murray does, classical in criticism and romantic in poetry, for no man can so sharply divide himself. The fact seems to be that in him there is a fusion of classicism and romanticism, stoicism and melancholy. If his urbanity of style makes him a classicist, his melancholy note makes him a romantic. What he lacked was the spontaniety and abundance of some of the greatest poets. Nevertheless, in a short period of poetic inspiration extending to four years or so (1849-53) he produced fine poetry. As compared with other great poets, the period of his poetic inspiration seems to be short, but in quality which if not the very best comes near the best such as in *Thyrsis*, *Sohrab and Rustum*, *Dover Beach*, and in some outstanding passages of other poems.

Arnold and Poetical Vocation. Besides his famous definition of poetry we get from Metthew Arnold the famous view of grand style which arises in poetry "when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or serverity, a serious subject. It is not quite clear what Arnold wanted to convey through the three words—simplicity, severity, and seriousness, and many critics, Saintsbury particularly, have criticised that definition of grand style.

Nor can there be just one grand style, for there may be several styles and all of them grand. But it brings to our mind the view-point of Arnold that he loved restraint and his advice was let the words be few. His own temperament was full of restraint and he expected all poets to write in the same restrained manner, which is really a Greek quality, for then Greeks wanted to practise restraint and conceal sentiments. Arnold's own poetry is, if not without emotion, at least without sentimentalism. There can be no poetry born of more contemplation, however reasonable the poet may be; yet it is mainly, indeed, to check one's sentiment, and not to be carried away by one's personal emotions. It is this curbing of sentiments which made Arnold a stoic. Arnold was sadly lacking in gaiety and humour, if not in life, at least in poetry, and that may explain for the classic severity. So far as simplicity was concerned, this too is a Greek characteristic. The Greeks believed in "unity of impression", which is impossible to achieve without simplicity. The choice of sujbect-matter was for Arnold a great poetic achievement. Seriousness of subject reflects purposiveness of poetry in which Arnold believed as a moral thinker. Application of great ideas to life, purposiveness and seriousness of subject, are logically interconnected.

Arnold's definition of potry as criticism of life is easy to understand when we remember that it was put forth in order to contradict the theory of "Art for the sake of Art'. Criticism of life here is offered by Arnold in opposition to Art for Art's sake. The heresy of the decadent school of art, claiming that art should be for its own sake, and without ulterior reference to life, was exposed by Arnold and other worshippers of life. Arnold was no escapist. At the same time we can say that he is prejudiced against art and takes a narrow view of poetry when he takes it to be a criticism of life, neither more nor less. By calling poetry at bottom a criticism of life, Arnold is hoisting the flag of idealism. He means that the poet should produce ideal pictures of life, and thereby offer a contrast to life as lived in actuality.

We can correct both the definitions of Arnold. His view of grand style is rather loose and wide of mark. May we not put it as follows:

The grand style arises in poetry when a great subject is treated by the action of imagination, with a severity or with a noble simplicity. There is a common factor lying under grandeur of style and greatness of subject. This would admit a fluidity and freedom to the artist, and if the subject will not be great, the treatment will change; while severity would mean economy of phrasing and simplicity of the unity of impression. As to criticism of life that also refers to the greatness of subject-matter, that is application of great ideas to life. But really the subject of great poetry has always been the sublimation of the common experience of mankind. Here the contact with the society remains unbroken and, yet, the propaganda element is eliminated. It was the "Moral Fussiness" (as Garrod puts it) which is responsible for Arnold's pre-occupation with moral propaganda, and this gave a peculiar temperament to him in which he could think of poetry as nothing but a vehicle for carrying out such propaganda.

Describing the functions of the poet, Arnold says that the poet does not see deep but wide ("Resignation"). It means that what really counts is the breadth of scope and not the depth of instinct. The deeper, inner life of human beings is something their own, but the social set-up, the inter-cummunication and relationship between the members of society is the subject of poet's contemplation. At another place, Arnold distinguishes between the poet, the musician and the painter (Epilogue to Lessings' Laocoon") The painter's sphere is to consider the outward semblance and give life to one moment during which he looks at things—"then let him choose his moment well." The inspired musician has a power of passion, wealth of change—he must choose some source of feeling. On the other hand, the poet considers "life's movement" with all its "pain and pleasure, rest and strife", and describe it. Thus the painter gives a snapshot of the passing reality, the musician gives us the feeling of the moment or a particular mood but a poet deals with the movement of life, that is, life

in all its aspects, with all its changes, the whole of life and not the passing reality, nor a particular mood. Such is Arnold's view of the poetical vocation. It is based upon his theory of "criticism of life". He himself tried to act upon his theory of poetry, but with what degree of success? He could not escape the onrush of feeling. He condemned romanticism precisely because he—as a philosopher and a classicist—found it suffused with feeling, but those of his poems have survived which are suffused with feeling, and are of a personal nature.

As a critic he has gone down in our critical estimate and his moral and "classical" poems have suffered the same fate.

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CHAPTER XI

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ARNOLD AND T. S. ELIOT AS CRITICS

Both Arnold and Eliot, being conscious upholders of classical values, seem to be in search of some positive and permanent critical standards as reaction against the anarchy of romantic school of thought. But Arnold despite his reigorous protests hardly outstep the Victorian world in his critical practice, Eliot has changed the conception of poetry, its values, shaping sensibilities of poets and existing literary order. Both of them recommend restraint, proportion and search for beauty and truth. But the methods adopted by them are different, though the goal is one and the same.

Arnold remains Victorian in his critical opinions and suffers from his over-insistance on the values of his time. On the other hand, Eliot, keeping one eye on the mistakes of his fore-runners and the other on the contemporary problems, grasped the situation with a more breadth of vision than anyone else.

Both appeal to traditions but their ways of looking back are different. Arnold proposes that examplary lines from Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton should be committed to the memory and applied as touchstones to know its poetic qualities. Thus he wants to assess poetry by means of concrete examples from great masters. This is essentially comparative method. But it is regrettable that the quotations he selects for the purpose are of one type and do not present full range and variety of poetic excellence. They are passages of what he calls *grand style* and interpret his own melancholy and privation. Moreover his personal

estimate contaminates the real one. In this way his method of critical comparison is limited and subjective. Yet there is another way by which he appeals to traditions. He assigns the duty of a sifter or a winnowner to the critic by saying that he should be equipped with all sorts of best knowledge that is known and said in the world. For this purpose he should read the works of both ancient and modern writers. In doing so a critic will create intellectual atmosphere suitable for the creative writers. Such a critic will certainly serve the creative purpose but when he practically handles some piece of literature, he himself being too scholarly, will underestimate his author.

For Eliot noble utterances of Arnold are insignificant. He is champion of orthodoxy, as against the liberalism of Arnold. He takes the traditions in the broadest sense which includes all conventions, literary devices, and habits of expression handed on to a writer from the past. Eliot modifies all conventions of past and harmonizes them with the modern consciousness. He attempts to master the past, to see it in terms of present—because present and past are nothing but magnification of time and space—to solve present problems in line with the solution and achievements of the past. Thus his analysis of whole culture, which extends from immemorial time to the present age, turn into criticism of life in terms of Arnold's definition of poetry. Keeping the demand of his age in view he takes more interest in the negative sides of physical nature of beauty than the positive ones.

Arnold's greatest tool of criticism is "disinterestedness" or complete detachment of mind from practical considerations. He says that the Greeks are valuable because of their "disinterested objectivity. He warns us to keep the criticism separate from religion, and politics lest it should deflect from its proper path. Caprice, waywardness and 'provinciality' must be eliminated. Arnold says, "I wish to decide nothing of my own authority, the great art of criticism is to get oneself out of the way, and tolet humanity decide." Only such criticism,

according to Arnold, would be worthy and impartial. Here he is right up to the mark. But it is impossible for a critic to be disinterested, especially when there exists an intellectual vacuum, which Arnold himself found in the romantic movement and condemned its literature. He forgets how the revolutionary violence in France and French threat of invasion had cut England off from the continent. Thus he without making any historical allowance for the romantics passes his judgment. He says that Byron was empty of matter, Shelley lacked coherence and Wordsworth, though profound, was devoid of variety.

As against the theory of "disinterestedness" by Arnold, Eliot warns that a critic should dircipline his personal prejudices and compose his *differences* with as many of his fellows as possible, in the pursuit of true judgment. He further tells that comparison and analysis are very usefnl tools in the field of criticism, provided they are held with a great care. Again, his theory of impersonality can be placed side by side with above-mentioned theory of Arnold. For him poet's personality is only a medium. He insists on separating the man who suffers and minds which create. In a similar way he separates art from experience. He says that man and experience can exist without traditions but poet and art cannot. Experience enters into art but it is thereby transformed and raised from personal to universal level. At bottom impersonality means that a poem is never mere self-expression but an experience which has its existence apart from the poet. It is ordering of experience which can recreate itself in other minds by means of what he calls objective corelative. Here again he is saturated with the classical spirit. For him any writer who fails to symbolize his spiritual experience, exactly as he had felt, is not a good artist. If his emotions are more than the external symbols, he will verge on the point of sentimentality. On the other hand if his spiritual expeience is lesser than the exterior form, the result will be artificiality. In this way Eliot advocates the true marriage of matter and form.

Arnold expects too much from poetry and wants to

use it as a medium of instruction rather than a form of art. He prefers the emotional ideas of poetry upon all branches of knowledge as well as upon religion and says that as science threatens the multitudinous life, poetry will sustain and console it. Philosophy, science and theology will be subdued by poetry. In this widest sense poetry is "criticism of life" to Arnold. This is a sweeping statement and is equally applicale to a whole range of imaginative literature. More than often Arnold remains a Victorian teacher. He exercises his professional outlook and forgets the limits of art. He intermingles the activites of a critic with a creative writer or vice versa. Moreover, his major concern is with the subject of poetry to which he attaches more than due importance. When Arnold passes judgements, with classical standards in his mind, he admits only Shakespeare and Milton as classics of the English literature and he examines Chaucer Dryden, Pope and Burns .only to exclude them. In Chaucer he finds all other qualities of great poetry such as largeness, freedom, shrewdness except high seriousness. It was overseriousness of the 19th century moralists which provoked Arnold in charging Chaucer for lack of "high seriousness." This quality is missing in Burns too. He does not mention Donne. His praise of Chancer and Burns is too limited and he omits Drydcn and Pope even from the category of poets and calls them classis of prose. Here his personal estimate steps in, in the real estimate.

In the use of language Arnold is closer to classics than Eliot. Here Eliot in compelled by the diversity of modern interest to use the language like Donne and his school, for here he finds correspondance between 17th century and his own age. He prefers hard and dry verse and rejects the conventional ornamentation. Symbols and allusions, not easily understandable, serve his purpose. His thought and language are steeped in emotions and intellect and he seeks the unification of both. His theory of unification is sensible.

It is Victorian values which move Arnold in passing the judgments in a utilitarian way. Moreover, his critic

is a first-hand creative artist. Arnold in his poetry is romantic and sentimental. Eliot with vast range of knowledge, as compared with the 18th century poet, and urge for classical values on one hand and consciousness of modern world on the other, remains predominantly classic.

Arnold believes that culture is study and persuit of perfection, search for sweetness and light and beauty and intillegence.

Eliot believes that there are three layers of culture, individual. national and international.

Chapter XII

ARNOLD'S CRITICAL DICTA AND OPINIONS OF CRITICS ABOUT HIM

Extracts from his *Preface to Poems* (1853-1854): Saintsbury writes this about the *Preface*: "This which is almost the earliest finished and formal document of Mr. Arnold's criticism, is also one of the best and most complete expressions of it. It contains, explicitly or implicitly, almost everything that he said later in substance; while its form is his very best—exhibiting his native elegance and acquired scholarship, without his later assumed mannerism.

"It has been said that I wish to limit the Poet in his choice of subjects to the period of Greek and Roman antiquity; but it is not so; I only counsel him to choose for his subjects great actions, without regarding to what time they belong. Nor do I deny that the poetic faculty can and does manifest itself in treating the most trifling action, the most hopeless subject.

"Again, with respect to the study of the classical writers of antiquity: it has been said that we should emulate rather than imitate them. I make no objection: all I say is, let us study them. They can help to cure us of what is, it seems to me, the great vice of our intellect, manifesting itself in our incredible vagaries in literature, in art, in religion, in morals; namely, that it is *fantastic* and wants *sanity*. Sanity—that is the great virtue of the ancient literature: the want of that is the great defect of the modern, in spite of all its variety and power."

"For the Muses", as Hesiod says, "were born that they might be a forgetfulness of evils, and a truce from cares:' and it is not enough that the Poet should add to the knowledge of men. It is required of him also that

he should add to their happiness. "All Art," says Schiller, "is dedicated to Joy, and there is no higher and no more serious problem, than how to make m:n. The right Art is that alone which creates the highest enjoyment.'

"What are the eternal objects of Poetry, among all nations and at all times? They are actions; human actions, possessing an inherent interest in themselves, and which are to be communicated in an interesting manner by the art of the Poet.

"The Poet, then, has in the first place to select an excellent action; and what actions are the most excellent? Those, certainly, which most powerfully appeal to the primary human affections; to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time.........The modernness or antiquity of an action, therefore, has nothing to do with its fitness for poetical representation; this depends on its inherent qualities. To the elementary part of our nature, to our passions, that which is great and passionate is eternally interesting; and interesting solely in proportion to its greatness and to its passions. A great human action of a thousand years ago is more interesting to it than a smaller human action of to-day, even though upon the representation of this last the most consummate skill may have been expended, and though it has the advantage of appealing by its modern language, familiar manners, contemporary allusions, to all our transient feelings and interests. These, however, have no right to demand of a poetical work that it shall satisfy them: their claims are to be directed elsewhere. Poetical works belong to the domain of our permanent passions: let them interest these and the voice of all subordinate claims is at once silenced.

"The date of an action, then, signifies nothing: the action itself, its selection and construction, this is what is all-important. This the Greeks understood far more correctly than we do. The radical difference between their poetical theory and ours consists, as it appears to me, in this: that, with them, the poetical character of

the action in itself, and the conduct of it, was the first consideration, with us, attention is fixed mainly on the value of the separate thoughts and images which occur in the treatment of an action. With them the action predominated over the expression of it ; with us, the expression predominates over the action. Not that they failed in expression, or were inattentive to it ; on the contrary, they are the highest models of expression, the unapproached masters of the *grand style* : but their expression is so excellent because it is so admirably kept in its right degree of prominence ; because it is so simple and so well subordinated ; because it draws its force directly from the pregnancy of the matter which it conveys.

"Their theory and practice alike, the admirable treatise of Aristotle and the unrivalled works of their poets exclaim with a thousand tongues—'all depends upon the subject ; choose a fitting action, penetrate yourself with a feeling of its situations ; this done, everything else will follow.'

"We have poems which seem to exist merely for the sake of single lines and passages ; nor for the sake of producing any total impression. We have critics who seem to direct their attention merely to detached expressions, to the language about the action, not to the action itself......... They will permit the poet to select any action he pleases, and to suffer that action to go as it will, provided he gratifies them with occasional bursts of fine writing, and with a shower of isolated thoughts and images. That is, they permit him to leave their poetical sense ungratified, provided that he gratifies their rhetorical sense and their curiosity.

"Shakespeare indeed choose excellent subjects—the world could afford no better than *Macbeth*, or *Romeo and Juliet*, or *Othello* ; he has no theory respecting the necessity of choosing subjects of present import or the paramount interest attaching to allegories of the state of one's mind ; like all great poets, he knew well what constituted a poetical action ; like them, wherever he found such an action, he took it ; like them, too, he found his best in past times. But to these general characteristics

of all great poets he added a special one of his own, a gift, namely, of abundant and ingenious expression, eminent and unrivalled : so eminent as irresistibly to strike the attention first in him, and even to throw into comparative shade his other excellences as a poet............Shakespeare is the great poet; he is from his skill in discerning and firmly conceiving an excellent action, from his power of intensely feeling a situation, of intimately associating himself with a character, not from his gift of expressien, which rather even leads him astray, degenerating sometimes into a fondness for curiosity of expression, into an irritability of fancy, which seems to make it impossible for him to say a thing plainly even when the press of the action demands the very directest language, or its level character the very simplest.........He has not the severe and scrupulous self-restraint of the ancients, partly, no doubt, because he had a far less cultivated and exacting audience : he has indeed a far wider range than they had, a far richer fertility of thought; in this respect he rises above them ; in his strong conception of his subject, in the genuine way in which he is penetrated with it, he resembles them, and is unlike the moderns ; *but* in the accurate limitation of it, the conscientious rejection of superfluities, the simple and rigorous development of it from the first line of his work to the last, he falls below them, and comes nearer to the moderns. In his chief works, besides what he has of his own, he has the elementary soundness of the ancients ; he has their important action and their large and broad manner ; but he has not their purity of method.

"I am speaking too.........not of the best sources of intellectual stimulus for the general reader, but of the best models of instruction, for the individual writer. This last may certainly learn of the aneients, better than anywhere else, three things which it is vitally important for him to know—the all-importance of the choice of a subject ; the necessity of accurate construction and the subordinate character of expression. He will learn from them how unspeakably superior is the effect of one moral impression left by a great action treated as a whole, to the effect produced by the most striking single thought, or by the

happiest image. As he penetrates into the spirit of the great classical works, as he becomes gradually aware of their intense significance, their noble simplicity and their calm pathos he will be convinced that it is this effect, unity and profoundness of moral impression at which the ancient Poets aimed, that it is this which constitutes the grandeur of their works and which makes them immortal. He will desire to direct his own efforts towards producing the same effect. Above all, he will deliver himself from the jargon of modern criticism, and escape the danger of producing poetical works conceived in the spirit of the passing time, and which partake of its transitoriness.

"Two kind of *dilettanti*", says Goethe, "there are in poetry : he who neglects the indispensable mechanical part, and thinks he has done enough if he shows spirituality and feeling : and he who seeks to arrive at poetry merely by mechanism, in which he can acquire an artisan's readiness and is without soul and matter. And he adds that the first does most harm to Art, and the least to himself."

Opinions of Critics about M. Arnold : "I am not myself, by any means, in general agreement—I am often in very particular disagreement—with Mr. Arnold's critical canons, and (less often) with his individual judgments. But as I look back over European criticism for the years (approaching a century) which have passed since his birth, I cannot find one critic, born since that time, who can be ranked above or even with him in general critical quality and accomplishment. And extending the view further over the vast expanse, from Aristotle to that birth-date, though, I certainly find greater critics—critics very much greater in originality, greater in catholicity, perhaps greater in felicity of individual utterance—I yet find that he is of their race and lineage, free of their company, one of them, not to be scanted of any sizings that can be, by however unworthy a manciple, allotted to them."

—*George Saintsbury.*

"In his two volumes of '*Essays in "Criticism*", we have studies of foreign and English authors, which exhibit more fully than any similar writings the changed

spirit......................all that can be said here is that the great object which Matthew Arnold the critic has seemed to have placed before him, is to interpret—to gather up all the facts which are of use as indicating the special conditions of the author's personality and the special motives of his work, and then of tracing the connection between these conditions and the excellences or defects which characterize his work. In short, of providing the reader with that preliminary basis of information which will enable him to read the work of the author with both discrimination and appreciation.

"Indirectly, however, in the course of these studies of particular authors he has enunciated certain principles of general application.

"1. He has emphasized and defined the connexion between the author and the age in which he lives, by pointing out that in every work of creative literature two distinct factors can be discerned—the personality of the writer and the mental atmosphere of the age. Gray is a case in point, and in his essay on his poetry he takes him as an example of a genius planted in an unfruitful soil and therefore doomed to comparative sterility.

"2. He has broadly characterized the philosophical aspect to all poetic representations of reality by the luminous expression that Poetry is a "criticism of life". That is to say, that the poet or novelist by creating ideal pictures of life provides an ideal standard with which the facts of real life can be concerned. And since such a comparison of the real with the ideal helps us to understand the general purpose and conditions of human existence, he defines the special quality of poetic thought as its "interpretative power". In particular he has distinguished with precision the truth of poetry from the truth of science and he has told us why it is that poetry by virtue of this power of interpretation becomes, as Wordsworth has said, 'the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge.' It is because it appeals to the *whole man*, to the emotions and feelings as well as to the reason. If we understand this interpretative power, as thus defined, to be

the subjective aspect of the appeal to the imagination—or the effect in the mind of the hearer or reader which the appeal of poetry produces—we shall find in the following passage a precise analysis of the effects of this appeal in the case of that art..................."The grand power of poetry is its interpretative power............ (See above.)

"3. Poetry of the highest class must exercise this power of interpretation. This appeal to the imagination (or, as Anrold himself calls it, to the "imaginative reasons"), within a given sphere and the accent of the masters of such poetryis the "high seriousness of absolute sincerity.

"For supreme poetical success more is required than the powerful application of ideas to life ; it must be an application under the conditions fixed by law of poetic truth and poetic beauty. These laws fix as an essential condition, in the poet's treatmeut of such matters as are here in question, high seriousness—the high seriousness which comes from absolute sinrerity. And such poetry must be essentially moral ; that is to say, it must be such as to satisfy the general sense of makind as embodied in the principles of morality."—*W. Basil Worsfold.*

"............A certain tincture of pride was natural to him and prevented him from appreciating some things of great human value. It prevented him, for instance, from having an adequate degree of popular sympathy. He had (what is so rare in England) the sense of the state of one thing, of all its citizens, the *Senatus Populusque Romanus*. But he had not the feeling of familiarity with the loves and hungers of the common man which is the essence of the egalitarian sentiment. He was a republican, but he was not a democrat. He contemptuously dismissed the wage-earning, bear-drinking, ordinary labourers of England 'as merely populace'. They are not pouplace ; they are merely mankind. If you do not like them you do not like mankind. And when all the *role* of Arnold's real glories has been told, there always does remain a kind of hovering doubt as to whether he did like mankind."

—*G. K. Chesterton.*

"Matthew Arnold's literary criticism, once regarded by young enthusiasts as a revelation, has long since taken a secure place in English letters. Like his poetry, unlike his

theology and his politics, it has original and intrinsic value. It is penetrating as well as brilliant, conscientious as well imaginative. Matthew Arnold may be said to have done for literature almost what Ruskin did for art. He reminded, or informed the British public that criticism was a serious thing; that good criticism was just as important as good authorship ; that it was not a question of individual taste but partly of received authority, and partly of trained judgment. His own masters, besides the old Greeks, were chiefly Goethe and Sainte-Beauve. But few critics have been so thoroughly original and still fewer have had so large a share of the 'daemonic faculty', the faculty which awakens intelligent enthusiasm in others. *Essays in Criticism* is one of the indipensable books. Not to have read it is to be ignorant of a great intellectual event."

—*Herbert W. Paul.*

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CHAPTER XIII

ESSAYS IN CRITICISM (SECOND SERIES) A BRIEF REVIEW

Essays in Criticism (second series) was published in 1888. A prefatory note to *Essays in Criticism* was contributed by Lord Coleridge. There are nine essays in all, the last two being *Count Leo Tolstoi* and *Amiel*, in which English readers might not be directly interested. The first essay, *The Study of Poetry*, with which the volume opens, was written for Humphry Ward's *Selections from the English Poets*. It is a well-documented essay, recording his mature judgments upon poetry. Truth and seriousness are the two elements to which he draws the reader's attentiom. If they make what good poetry should be, he holds that they are inseparable from style and manner. In good poetry then there is a perfect correspondence between matter or content and form or style. To begin with, this is a sound approach to poetry; it is a recognition of organic connection between thought and style. The essay has a fairly wide range. He proceeds to develop the idea that poetry is a criticism of life under conditions fixed for it by poetic truth and poetic beauty. The historic estimate or the personal estimate cannot establish good poetry. He points out how either of them leads us away from a correct assessment of the true qualities of poetry. The practical way of arriving at the real estimate is to study great poetry, and fix in the mind the memorable lines and passages and apply them as a test.

Briefly, but discursively, Arnold reviews the course and development of poetry. What he means by a real estimate he applies to Burns. In coming to speak of Chaucer he traces the development of early French poetry—the poetry of the Troubadours (southern France), and the poetry of Trouvers (northern France), and shows Chaucer's

superiority in substance and style of poetry, which determins the future of English poetry—a fact clearly pointed out by Arnold. The age of Dryden and Pope is an age of prose which meant a consequent fall-off in poetry, and it is shown how the age hampered Gray. In spite of anti-romantic proclivities, he does justice to Burns, even when pointing out his limitations.

The second essay '*Milton*' was Arnold's address delivered in St. Margaret's Westminster on February 13, 1888. He warns against the Anglo-Saxon contagion *i.e.*, predominance of material interest in life which is a danger to the ideal of high and rare excellence in art and letters. The great style of Milton, on which Arnold lays all emphasis can be a corrective to the tendency mentioned above.

In his essay on '*Gray*' he investigates the cause of the poet's sterility. The age was uncongenial to him. If he had been born either in the Elizabethan age or in the era of the French Revolution, he might have done much better. 'He never spoke out'—these are the words of Gray's friend, James Brown, the master of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge. In these words Arnold finds the kneynote to the scantiness of his poetic production.

About '*Keats*' he has something to say on his weakness of character, and deprecates his taste, but admits that he is great poet in so far as he possesses Shakespeare's "natural magic" by which Arnold means Keats's rendering of expression, though he does not possess Shakespeare's faculty of moral interpretation. After all, Keats is of the lineage of Shakespeare.

'*Wordsworth*' is Arnold's favourite poet. He finds in Wordsworth what he calls the criticism of life—a noble and profound application of ideas to life. But he points out that Wordsworth needs to be discriminatingly studied. In his larger poems— *Excursion* and *Prelude*—there is much that is dull, flat and prosy. Wordsworth's greatness, according to Arnold, lies in his powerful application to his subject, of ideas "on men, on nature, and on human life." Arnold's moral prepossession comes in here, and he quotes Voltaire

saying that the great merit of English poets lies in treating moral ideas. Now Arnold means that it is the question, *how to live*. And this means again the powerful and profound application of ideas to life, there being no harm in designating idea as 'moral' since human life is predominantly moral. Wordsworth has a large share in the application of ideas to life. Arnold attaches no value to a philosopnical interpretation (attempted by some critics) of Wordsworth's poetry.

Arnold does more than justice to '*Byron*', which he would have been temperamentally incapable of doing. Byron was a rebel, and carried his lawlesseness into art. The wise restraint of the Greeks' which Arnold admires so much and to which he is dedicated as critic, is alien to Byron. Yet Arnold discovers in Byron "sincerity and strength", to quote Swindurne's phrase. Byron is, therefore, great in spite of his limitations. Arnold might have been influenced by Goethe's high opinion of Byron. Byron's fight against the British Philistinism might have been another is factor. Arnold himself campaigned against the British Philistinism.

His essay on '*Shelley*, is a review of Dowden's *Life of Shelley*. According to Arnold, Dowden has not shown a good taste in going into all details of Shelley's relations with one woman after another. And his defence of Shelley has made things worse for Shelley. Arnold condemns Shelley on moral grounds—"an entirely human inflammability, joined to an inhuman want of humour and a superhuman power of self-deception." By these causes he explains Shelley's abandonment of Harriet Sestbrook. There is, however, some truth in his description of Shelley as "a beautiful and ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain." He does little justice to his exquisite lyrical gift, to his passionate (if a little abstract) love of humanity, to his revolutionary ardour.

Arnold does not seem to be quite fair to '*Tolstoi*'. He praises Tolsti's realism. But his realism makes it all the worse for art as far as *Anna Karenine* is concerned. This is an opinion which few will defend. Arnold is tied up with the Greek standarad of sanity and temperance— and seems to apply

it too severely. That seems to be the reason for finding fault with *Anna Karenine*. He sketches the rise of realism in fiction, and follows Sainte-Beuve in this matter. Realism in fiction started first in France, and Russia followed the example. The truth of this may be disputed by some.

In the last essay '*Amiel*' Arnold briefly analyses Amiel's speculative philosophy, which is based upon Plotinus. But Arnold thinks more highly of Amiel as a critic than as a philosopher. He might have made even a better critic than Sainte-Beuve if he had given more time to the art of criticism than to philosophy.

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TEXT

THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM AT THE PRESENT TIME

Many objections have been made to a proposition which, in some remarks of mine on translating Homer, I ventured to put forth : a proposition about criticism, and its imporance at the present day. I said : "Of the literature of France and Germany, as of the intellect of Europe in general, the main effort, for now many years, has been a critical effort ; the endeavour, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is." I added, that owing to the operation in English literature of certain causes, "almost the last thing for which one would come to English literature is just that very thing which now Europe most desires, criticism," and that the power and value of English literature was thereby impaired. More than one rejoinder declared that the importance I heve assigned to criticism was execssive, and asserted the inherent superiority of the creative effort of the human spirit over its critical effort. And the other day, having been led by a Mr. Sharip's excellent notice of Wordsworth to turn again to his biography I found, in the words of this great man, whom I, for one, must always listen to with the profoundest respect, a sentence passed on the critic's business, which seems to justify every possible disparagement of it. Wordsworth says in one of his letters :

The writers in the publications, (the Reviews), "while they prosecute their inglorious employment cannot be supposed to be in a state of mind very favourable of being affected by the finer influences of a thing so pure as genuine poetry."

And a trustworthy reporter of conversation quotes a more elaborate judgment to the same effect :

"Wordsworth holds the critical power very low, infinitely lower than the inventive ; and he said to-day that if the quantity of time consumed in writing critiques on the works of others were given to original composition, of whatever kind it might be, it would be much better employed ; it would make a man find out sooner his own level, and it would do infinitely less mischief. A false or malicious criticism may do much injury to the minds of others, a stupid invention, either in prose or verse, is quite harmless."

It is almost too much to expect of poor human nature that a man capable of producing some effect in one line of literature, should, for the greater good of society, voluntarily doom himself to impotence and obscurity in another. Still less is this to be expected from men addicted to the composition of the "false or malicius criticism" of which Wordsworth speaks. However, everybody would admit that a false or malicious criticism had better never have been written. Everybody, too, would be willing to admit, as a general proposition, that the critical faculty is lower than the inventive. But is it true that criticism is really, in itself, a baneful and injurious employment : is it true that all time given to writing critiques on the works of others would be much better employed if it were given to original composition, of whatever kind this may be ? Is it true that Johnson had better have gone on producing more *Irenes* instead of writing his *Lives of the Poets* : nay, is it certain that Wordsworth himself was better employed in making his Ecclesiastical Sonnets than when he made his celebrated Preface, so full of criticism, and criticism of the work of others? Wordsworth was himself a great critic, and it is to be sincerely regretted that he has not left us more criticism ; Goethe was one of the greatest of critics, and we may sincerely congratulate ourselves that he has left us so much criticism. Without wasting time over the exaggeration which Wordsworth's judgment on criticism clearly contains, or over an attempt to trace the causes,—not

difficult, I think, to be traced,—which may have led Wordsworth to this exaggeration, a critic may with advantage seize an occasion for trying his own conscience, and for asking himself of what real service at any given moment the practice of criticism either is or may be made to his own mind and spirit, and to the minds and spirits of others.

The critical power is of lower rank than the creative. True; but in assenting to this proposition, one or two things are to be kept in mind. It is undeniable that the exercise of a creative power, that a free creative activity, is the highest function of man; it is proved to be so by man's finding in it his true happiness. But it is undeniable, also, that men may have the sense of exercising this free creative activity in other ways than in producing great works of literature or art; if it were not so, all but a very few men would be shut out from the true happiness of all men. They may have it in well-doing, they may have it in learning, they may have it even in criticising. This is one thing to be kept in mind. Another is, that the exercise of the creative power in the production of great works of literature or art, however high this exercise of it may rank, is not at all epochs and under all conditions possible, and that therefore labour may be vainly spent in attempting it, which might with more fruit be used in preparing for it, in rendering it possible. This creative power works with elements, with materials; what if it has not those materials, those elements, ready for its use? In that case it must surely wait till they are ready. Now, in literature,—I will limit myself to literature, for it is about literature that the question arises,—the elements with which the creative power works are ideas; the best ideas on every matter which literature touches, current at the time. At any rate we may lay it down as certain that in modern literature no manifestation of the creative power not working with these can be very important of fruitful. And I say *current* at the time, not merely accessible at the time: for creative literary genius does not principally show itself in discovering new ideas, that is rather the business of the philosopher. The grand work of literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery; its gift lies in the

faculty of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, by a certain order of ideas, when it finds itself in them ; of dealing divinely with these ideas, presenting them in the most effective and attractive combinations,—making beautiful works with them, in short. But it must have the atmosphere, it must find itself amidst the order of ideas, in order to work freely ; and there it is not so easy to command. That is why great creative epochs in literature are so rare, that is why there is so much that is unsatisfactory in the productions of many men of real genius, because, for the creation of a master-work of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment ; the creative power has, for its happy exercise, appointed elements, and those elements aoe not in its own control.

Nay, they are more within the control of the critical power. It is the business of the criticial power, as I said in the words already quoted, "in all branches of knowledge: theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is". Thus it tends, at last, to make an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself. It tends to establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, by comparison with that which it displaces ; to make the best ideas prevail. Presently, these new ideas reach society, the touch of truth is the touch of life, and there is a stir and growth everywhere ; out of this stir and growth come the creative epochs of literature.

Or, to narrow our range, and quit these considerations of the general march of geniue and of society,—considerations which are apt to become too abstract and impalpable,—every one can see that a poet, for instance, ought to know life and the world before dealing with them in poetry ; and life and the world being in modern times very complex things, the creation of a modern poet, to be worth much, implies a great critical effort behind it, else it must be a comparatively poor, barren, and short-lived affair. That is why Byron's poetry had so little endurance in it and Goethe's so much ; both Byron and Goethe had a great productive power, but Goethe's was nourished by a great critical effort providing

the true material for it, and Byron's was not ; Goethe knew life and the world, the poet's necessary subject, much more comprehensively and thoroughly than Byron. He knew a great deal more of them, and be knew them much more as they really are.

It has long seemed to me that the burst of creative activity in our literature, through the first quarter of this century, has about it in fact something premature ; and that from this cause its productions are doomed, most of them, in spite of sanguine hopes which accompanied and do still accompany them, to prove hardly more lasting than the productions of far less splendid epochs. And this prematureness comes from its having proceeded without having its proper date, without sufficient materials to work with. In other words, the English poetry of the first quarter of this century, with plenty of energy, plenty of creative force, did not know enough. This makes Byron so empty of matter, Shelley so incoherent, Wordsworth even, profound as he is, yet so wanting in completeness and variety. Wordsworth cared little for books, and disparaged Goethe. I admire Wordsworth, as he is, so much that I cannot wish him different ; and it is vain, no doubt, to imagine such a man different from what he is, to suppose that he *could* have been different. But surely the one thing wanting to make Wordsworth an even greater poet than he is—, his thought richer, and his influence of wider application,—was that he should have read more books, among them, no doubt, those of that Goethe whom he disparaged without reading him.

But to speak of books and reading may easily lead to a misunderstanding here. It was not really books and reading that lacked to our poetry at this epoch ; Shelley had plenty of reading, Coleridge had immense reading; Pindar and Sophocles—as we all say so glibly, and often with so little discernment of the real import of what we are saying—had not many books ; Shakespeare was no deep reader. True ; but in the Greece of Pindar and Sophocles, in the England of Shakespeare, the poet lived in a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power ; society was, in the fullest measure, permeated by

fresh thought, intelligent and alive. And this state of things is the true basis for the creative power's exercise; in this it finds its data, its materials, truly ready for its hand ; all the books and reading in the world are only valuble as they are helps to this. Even when this does not actually exist, books and reading may enable a man to construct a kind of semblance of it in his own mind, a world of knowledge and intelligence in which he may live and work. This is by no means an equivalent to the artist for the nationally diffused life and thought of the epochs of Sophocles or Shakespeare ; but, besides that it may be a means of preparation for such epochs, it does really constitute, if many share in it, a quickening and sustaining atmosphere of great value. Such an atmosphere, the many-sided learning and the long and widely-combined critical effort of Germany formed for Goethe, when he lived and worked. There was no national glow of life and thought there as in the Athens of Pericles or the England of Elizabeth. That was the poet's weakness. But there was a sort of equivalent for it in the complete culture and unfettered thinking of a large body of Germans. That was his strength. In the England of the first quarter of this century there was neither a national glow of life and thought, such as we had in the age of Elizabeth, nor yet a culture and a force of learning and criticism such as were to be found in Germany. Therefore the creative power of poetry wanted, for success in the highest sense, materials and a basis ; a through interpretation of the world was necessarily denied to it..

But Burke is so great because, almost alone in England, he brings thought to bear upon politics, he saturates politics with thought. It is his accident that his ideas were at the service of an epoch of concentration, nct of an epoch of speech expansion : it is his characteristic that he so lived by ideas, and had such a source of them welling up within him, that he could float even an epoch of concentration and English Tory politics with them. It does not hurt him that Dr. Price and the Liberals were enraged with him ; it does not even hurt him that George the Third, and the Tories were enchanted with him. His greatness is that he lived in a

world which neither English Liberalism nor English Toryism is apt to enter ;—the world of ideas, not the world of catch-words and party habits. So far is it from being really true of him that he "to party gave up what was meant for mankind," that at the very end of his fierce struggle with the French Revolution, after all his invectives against its false pretensions, hollowness, and madness, with his sincere conviction of its mischievousness, he can close a memorandum on the best means of combating it, some of the last pages he ever wrote,—the *Thoughts on French Affairs*, in December 1791,—with these striking words :—

"The evil is stated, in my opinion, as it exists. The remedy must be where power, wisdom, and information, I hope, are more united with good intentions than they can be with me. I have done with this subject, I believe, for ever. It has given me many anxious moments for the last two years. *If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it ; the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope will forward it ; and then they who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs, will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself, than the mere designs of men. They will not be resolute and firm, but perverse and obstinate.*"

That return of Burke upon himself has always seemed to me one of the finest things in English literature, or indeed in any literature. That is what I call living by idea : when one side of question has long had your earnest support, when all your feelings are engaged, when you hear all round you no language but one, when your party talks this language like a steam-engine and can imagine no other, still to be able to think, still to be irresistibly carried, if so it be, by the current of thought to the opposite of the question, and, like Balaam, to be unable to speak anything *but what the Lord has put in your mouth.* I know nothing more striking, and I must add that I know nothing English, more un-English.

For the Englishman, in general, is like my friend, the Member of Parliament, and believes, point-blank, that for

a thing to be an anormal is absolutely no objection to it whatever. He is like the Lord Auckland of Burke's day, who, in a memorandum on the French Revolution, talks of "certain miscreants, assuming the name of philosophers, who have presumed themselves capable of establishing a new system of society." The Englishman has been called a political animal, and he values what is political and practical so much that ideas easily become objects of dislike in his eyes, and thinkers "miscreants," because ideas and thinkers have rashly meddled with politics and practice. This would be all very well if the dislike and neglect confined themselves to ideas transported out of their own sphere, and meddling rashly with practice; but they are inevitably extended to ideas as such, and to the whole life of intelligence; practice is everything, a free-play of the mind is nothing. The notion of the free-play of the mind upon all subjects being a pleasure in itself, being an object of desire, being an essential provider of elements without which a nation's spirit, whatever compensations it may have for them must, in the long run, die of inanition, hardly enters into an Englishman's thoughts. It is noticeable that the word *curiosity*, which in other languages is used in a good sense, to mean, as a high and fine quality of man's nature, just this disinterested love of a free-play of the mind on all subjects, for its own sake,—it is noticeable, I say, that this word has in our language no sense of the kind, no sense but a rather bad and disparaging one. But criticism, real criticism, is essentially the exercise of this very quality. It obyes an instinct prompting it to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespectively of practice, politics, and everything of the kind; and to value knowledge and thought as they approach this best, without the intrusion of any other considerations whatever. This is an instinct for which there is, I think, little original sympathy in the practical English nature, and what there was of it has undergone a long benumbing period of blight and suppression in the epoch of concentration whicn followed the French Revolution.

But epochs of concentration cannot well endure for ever; epochs of expansion, in the due course of things,

follow them. Such an epoch of expansion seems to be opening in this country. In the first place all danger of a hostile forcible pressure of foreign ideas upon our practice has long disappeared; like the traveller in the fable, therefore we begin to wear our clock a little more loosely. Then, with a long peace, the ideas of Europe steal gradually and amicably in, and mingle, though in infinitesimally small quantities at a time, with our own notions. Then, too, in spite of all that is said about the absorbing and brutalising influence of our passionate material progress, it seems to me indisputable that this progress is likely, though not certain, to lead in the end to an apparition of intellectual life; and that man, after he has made himself perfectly comfortable and has now to determine what to do with himself next, may begin to remember that he has a mind, and that the mind may be made the source of great pleasure. I grant, it is mainly the privilege of faith, at present, to discern to this end to our railways, our business, and our fortune-making; but we shall see if, here as elsewhere, faith is not in the end the true prophet. Our ease, our travelling, and our unbounded liberty to hold just as hard and securely as we please to the practice to which our notions have given birth, all tend to beget an inclination to deal a little more freely with these notions themselves, to canvass them a little, to penetrate a little into their real nature. Fluttering of curiosity, in the foreign sense of the word, appears amongst us, and it is in these that criticism must look to find its account. Criticism first; a time of true creative, activity perhaps,—which, as I have said, must inevitably be proceded amongst us by a time of criticism,—hereafter, when criticism has done its work.

It is of the least importance that English criticism should clearly discern what rule for its course, in order to avail itself of the field now opening to it, and to produce fruit for the future, it ought to take. The rule may be summed up in one word,—*disinterestedness*. And how is criticism to show disinterestedness? By keeping aloof from what is called "the practical view of things;" by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free-play of the mind on all subjects which it touches. By steadily

refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas, which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them, which perhaps ought often to be attached to them, which in this country at any rate are certain to be attached to them quite sufficiently, but which criticism has really nothing to do with. Its business is, as I have said, simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas. Its business is to do this with inflexible honesty, with due ability ; but its business is to do no more, and to leave alone all questions of practical consequences and applications, questions which will never fail to have due prominence given to them. Else criticism, besides being really false to its own nature, merely continues in the old rut which it has hitherto followed in this country, and will certainly miss the chance now given to it. For what is at present the bane of criticism in this country ? It is that practical considerations cling to it and stifle it. It subserves interests not its own. Our organs of criticism are organs of men and parties having practical ends to serve, and with them those practical ends are the first thing and the play of mind the second ; so much play of mind as is compatible with the prosecution of those practical ends is all that is wanted. An organ like the *Revue Dex Deux Mondes*, having for its main function to understand and utter the best that is known and thought in the world, existing, it may be said, as just an order for a free play of the mind, we have not. But we have the *Edinburgh Review*, existing as an organ of the old Whigs. and for as much play of the mind as may suit its being that we have the *Quarterly Review*, existing as an organ of the Tories, and for as much play of mind as may suit its being that ; we have the *British Quartely Review*, existing as an organ of the political Dissenters and for as much play of mind as may suit its being that ; we have the *Times*, existing as an organ of the common, satisfied, well-to-do Englishmen, and for as much play of mind as may suit its being that. And so on through all the various fractions, political and religious, of our society;

every fraction has, as such, its organ of criticism, but the notion of combining all fractions in the common pleasure of a free, disinterested play of mind meets with no favour. Directly this play of mind wants to have more scope, and to forget the pressure of practical consideration a little, it is checked, it is made to feel the chain. We saw this the other day in the extinction, so much to be regretted, of the *Home and Foreign Review*. Perhaps in no organ of criticism in this country was there so much knowledge, so much play of mind; but these could not save it. The *Dublin Review*, subordinates play of mind to the practical business of English and Irish Catholicism, and lives. It must need be that men should act in sect and parties, that each of these sects and parties should have its organ, and should make this organ subserve the interests of its action; but it would be well, too, that there should be a criticism, not the minister of these interests, not their enemy, but absolutely and entirely independent of them. No other criticism will ever attain any real authority or make any real way towards its end,—creating a current of true and fresh ideas.

It is because criticism has so little kept in the pure intellectual sphere, has so little detached itself from practice, has been so directly polemical and controversial that it has so ill-accomplished, in this country, its best spiritual work; which is to keep man from a self-satisfaction which is retarding and vulgarising, to lead him towards perfection, by making his mind dwell upon what is excellent in itself, and the absolute beauty and fitness of things. A polemical practical criticism makes men blind even to the ideal imperfection of their practice, makes them willingly assert its ideal perfection, in order the better to secure it against attack; and clearly this is narrowing and baneful for them. If they were reassured on the practical side, speculative considerations of ideal perfection they might be brought to entertain, and their spiritual horizon would thus gradually widen. Sir Charles Adderley says to the Warwickshire farmers:—

"Talk of the improvement of breed! Why, the race we ourselves represent, the men and women, the old Anglo-Saxon race, are the best breed in the whole world...The

absence of a too enervating climate, too unclouded skies, and a too luxurious nature, has produced so vigorous a race of people, and has rendered us so superior to all the world."

Mr. Roebuck says to the Sheffield cutlers :—

"I look around me and ask what is the state of England? Is not property safe? Is not every man able to say what he likes? Can you not walk from one end of England to the other in perfect security? I ask you whether the world over or in past history, there is anything like it? Nothing. I pray that our unrivalled happiness may last."

Now obviously there is a peril for poor human nature in words and thoughts of such exuberant self-satisfaction, until we find ourselves safe in the streets of the Celestial City.

"Das wenige verschwindet leicht dem Blicke
Der vorwarts sicht, wie viel noch ubrig bleibt—"

says Goethe : "the little that is done seems nothing when we look forward and see how much we have yet to do. Clearly this is a better line of reflection for weak humanity, so long as it remains on this earthly field of labour and trial.

It will be said that it is a very subtle and indirect action which I am thus prescribing for criticism, and that, by embracing in this manner the Indian virtue of detachment and abandoning the sphere of practical life, it condemns itself to a slow and obscure work. Slow and obscure it may be, but it is the only proper work of criticism. The mass of mankind will never have any ardent zeal for seeing things as they are; very inadequate ideas will always satisfy them. On these inadequate ideas repose, and must repose the general practice of the world. That is as much as saying that whoever sets himself to see things as they are will find himself one of a very small circle; but it is only by this small circle resolutely doing its own work that adequate ideas will ever get current at all. The rush and roar of practical life will always have a dizzying and attracting effect upon the most collected spectator, and tend to draw him into its vortex; most of all will this be the case where that life is so powerful as it is in England. But it is only by

remaining collected, and refusing to lend himself to the point of view of the practical man, that the critic can do the practical man any service; and it is only by the greatest sincerity in pursuing his own course, and by at last convincing even the practical man of his sincerity, that he can escape misunderstandings which perpetually threaten him.

I say the critic must be kept out of the region of immediate practice in the political, social, humanitarian sphere, if he wants to make a beginning for that more free speculative treatment of things, which may perhaps one day make its benefits felt even in this sphere, but in a natural and hence irresistible manner.

Do what he will, however, the critic will still remain exposed to frequent misunderstandings, and nowhere so much as in this country. For here people are particularly indisposed even to comprehend that without this free, disinterested treatment of things, truth and the highest culture are out of the question. So immersed are they in practical life, so accustomed to take all their notions from this life and its processes, that they are apt to think that truth and culture themselves can be reached by the processes of this life, and that it is an impertinent singularity to think of reaching them in any other. "We are all *terrae filii*" cries their eloquent advocate ; "all Philistines together. Away with the notion of proceeding by any other course than the course dear to the Philistines; let us have a social movement, let us organise and combine a party to pursue truth and new thought, let us call it *the liberal party*, and let us all stick to each other, and back each other up. Let us have no nonsense about independent criticism, and intellectual delicay, and the few and the many. Don't let us trouble ourselves about foreign thought; we shall invent the whole thing for ourselves as we go alone If one of us speaks well, applaud him if one of us speaks ill, applaud him too; we are all in the same movement, we are all liberals, we are all in pursuit of truth." In this way the pursuit of truth becomes really a social, practical, pleasurable affair, almost requiring a chairman, a secretary, and advertisements: with the excitement of an occasional scandal, with

a little resistance to give the happy sense of difficulty overcome; but, in general, plenty of battle and very little thought. To act is so easy, as Goethe says; to think is so hard! It is true that the critic has many temptations to go with the stream, to make one of the party movement, one of these *terrae filii*; it seems ungracious to refuse to be a *terrae filius*, when so many excellent people are; but the ctitic's duty is to refuse, or, if resistance is vain, at least to cry with Obermann : *Perisons en resistant.*

For criticism, these are elementary laws, but they never can be popular, and in this country they have been very little followed, and one meets with immense obstacles in following them. That is a reason for asserting them again and again. Criticism must maintain its independence of the practical spirit and its aims. Even with well-meant efforts of the practical spirit it must express dissatisfaction, if in the sphere of the ideal they seem impoverishing and limiting. It must hurry on the goal because of its practical importance. It must be patient, and try to know to wait ; and flexible, and know how to attach itself to things and how to withdraw from them. It must be apt to study and praise elements that for the fullness of spiritual perfection are wanted, even though they belong to a power which in the practical sphere may be maleficent. It must be apt to discern the spiritual shortcomings or illusions of powers that in the practical sphere may be beneficent. And this without any notion of favouring or injuring the practical sphere, one power or the other ; without any notion of playing off, in this sphere, one power against the other.

I lately heard a man of thought and energy contrasting the want of ardour and movment which he now found amongst yonug men in this country with what he remembred in his own yotuh, twenty years ago. "What reformers we were then !" he exclaimed ; "what a zeal we had ! how we canvassed every institution in Church and State, and were prepared to remodel them all on first principles !" He was inclined to regret, as a spiritual flagging, the lull which he saw. I am disposed rather to regard it as a pause in which the turn to a new mode of spiritual progress is being accomplished. Everything was long seen, by the

young and ardent amongst us, in inseparable connection with politics and practical life. We have pretty well exhausted the benefits of seeing things in this connection, we have got all that can be got by so seeing them. Let us try a more disinterested mode of seeing them ; let us betake ourselves more to the serener life of the mind and spirit. This life, too, may have its excesses and dangers ; but they are not for us at present. Let us think of quietly enlarging our stock of true and fresh ideas, and not, as soon as we get an idea or half an idea, be running out with it into the street, and trying to make it rule there. Our ideas will, in the end, shape the world all the better for maturing a little.

I have wished, above all, to insist on the attitude which criticism should adopt towards things in general ; on its right tone and temper of mind. But then comes another question as to the subject-matter which literary criticism should most seek. Here, in general, its course is determined for it by the idea which is the law of its being ; the idea of a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas. By the very nature of things, as England is not all the world, much of the best that is known and thought in the world cannot be of English growth, must be foreign ; by the nature of things again, it is just this that we are least likely to know, while English thought is streaming in upon us from all sides, and takes excellent care that we shall not be ignorant of its existence. The English critic of literature, therefore, must dwell much on foreign thought, and with particular heed on any part of it, which, while significant and fruitful in itself, is for any reason specially likely to escape him. Again, judging is often spoken of as the critic's one business, and so in some sense it is ; but the judgment which almost insensibly forms itself in a fair and clear mind, along with fresh knowledge, is the valuable one ; and thus knowledge, and ever fresh knowledge, must be the critic's great concern for himself. And it is by communicating fresh knowledge, and letting his own judgment pass along with it,—but insensibly, and in the second place, not the first, as a sort of companion and clue, not as an abstract law-

giver,—that the critic will generally do most good to his readers. Sometimes, no doubt, for the sake of estabiishing an author's place in literature, and his relation to a central standard (and if this is not done, how are we to get at our *best in the world*?) criticism may have to deal with a subject-matter so familliar that fresh knowledge is out of the question, and then it must be all judgment ; an enunciation, and detailed application of principles. Here the great safeguard is never to let oneself become abstract, always to retain an intimate and lively consciousness of the truth of what one is saying, and, the moment this fails us, to be sure that something is wrong. Still, under all circumstances, this mere judgment and application of principles is, in itself, not the most satisfactory work to the critic ; like mathematics it is tautological, and cannot well give us, like fresh learning, the sense of creative activity.

But stop, some one will say ; all this talk is of no practical use to us whatever ; this criticism of yours is not what we have in our minds when we speak of criticism ; when we speak of critics and criticism, we mean critics and criticism of the current English literature of the day ; when you offer to tell criticism its function, it is to this criticism that we expect you to address yourself. I am sorry for it, for I am afraid I must disappoint these expectations. I am bound by my own definition of criticism : *a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.* How much of current English literature comes into this "best that is known and thought in world?" Not very much, I fear certainly less, at this moment, than for the current literature of France or Germany. Well, then, am I to alter my definition of criticism, in order to meet the requirements of a number of practising English critics, who after all are free in their choice of a business? That would be making criticism lend itself just to one of those alien practical considerations so which, I have said, are so fatal to it. One may say, indeed, to those who have to deal with the mass—so much better disregarded—of current English literature, that they may at all events endeavour, in dealing with this, to try it so far as they can, by the standard of the best that is known and thought in the

world ; one may say, that to get anywhere near this standard every critic should try and possess one great literature, at least, besides his own ; and the more unlike his own, the better. But, after all, the criticism I am really concerned with,—the criticism which alone can much help us for the future, the criticism which, throughout Europe, is at the present day meant, when so much stress is laid on the importance of criticism and the critical spirit,—is a criticism which regards Europe as being, for intellectual and spiritual purposes, one great confederation, bound to joint action and working to a common result : and whose members have for their proper outfit a knowledge of Greek, Roman, and Eastern antiquity, and of one another. Special, local and temporary advantages being put out of account, that modern nation will in the intellectual and spiritual sphere make most progress, which most thoroughly carries out this programme,—And what is that is but saying that we too, all of us, as individuals, the more thoroughly we carry it out, shall make the more progress ?

There is so much inviting us !—what are we to take ? What will nourish us in growth towards perfection ? That is the question which, with the immense field of life and of literature lying before him, the critic has to answer ; for himself first, and afterwards for others. In this idea of the critic's business the essays brought together in the present volume have had their origin ; in this idea, widely different as are their subjects, they have, perhaps, their unity.

I conclude with what I said at the beginning : to have the sense of creative activity is the great happiness and the great proof of being alive, and it is not denied to criticism to have ; but then criticism must be sincere, simple, flexible, ardent, ever widening its knowledge. Then it may have, in no contemptible measure, a joyful sense of creative activity ; a sense which man's insight and conscience will prefer to what he might derive from a poor, starved, fragmentary, inadequate creation. And at some epochs no other creation is possible.

Still, in full measure, the sense of creative activity belongs only to genuine creation ; in literature we must never

forget that. But what true man of letters ever can forget it? It is no such common matter for a gifted nature to come into possession of a current of true and living ideas, and to produce amidst the inspiration of them, that we are likely to underrate. The epochs of Aeschylus and Shakespeare make us feel their pre-eminence. In an epoch like those is, no doubt, the true life of literature; there is the promised land, towards which criticism can only beckon. That promised land it will not be ours to enter, and we shall die in the wilderness; but to have desired to enter it, to have saluted it from afar, is already, perhaps, the best distinction among contemporaries; it will certainly be the best title to esteem with posterity.

THE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM AT THE PRESENT TIME

(*Critical Analysis and Exposition*)

Arnold's plea for criticism and objections raised against it :

Arnold in translating Homer remarked that the literatures of France and Germany were rich in criticism in all branches of knowledge, as philosophy, history, art, science etc., while English literature lacked it very badly. It was the thing most needed by Europe and the power of English literature was impaired by this drawback. Objections were raised against this view-point saying that the creative activity of the human spirit was far superior to the critical effort. Mr. Shairp quoted Wordsworth who said that the frame of mind of a critic was not very favourable for being affected by the finer influences of a thing so pure as genuine poetry. It was further pointed out that Wordsworth held the critical power very low, and that a false and evil kind of criticism does a lot of injury to the minds of others.

Creative activity is not possible at all times :

If a man is not capable of producing something creative he should debar himself from writing any criticism at which he may have sufficient power ? Is it really true that criticism has a baneful and injurious effect on literature ? Not at all. Dr. Johnson, Wordsworth and Goethe have made valuable contributions to the literature of criticism. It may be quite true that the critical power is of lower rank than the creative, but two things have to be kept in mind. First, that some men find happiness in free creative activity by producing works of art and literature while others find it in doing service of mankind, still others in learning, and some have

it in criticising. Secondly, the exercise of creative power in works of art is not possible in all epochs (periods) and under all conditions. This creative power works with elements and with materials, and if these are wanting, a man of genius cannot produce anything great. The elements with which creative power works are the best ideas on every matter current at the time. A literary genius does not discover new ideas, that is rather the business of the (philosopher. His work is that of synthesis and exposition *i.e.*, combining together and explaining, not of analysis and discovery. He is happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere. He presents the ideas in most effective and attractive combinations, making beautiful works out of them. But he must find himself in the midst of that atmosphere. That is why creative periods in literature are so rare. For the creation of a masterpiece of literature two powers must agree, the power of the man and the power of moment. When the latter is missing, anything great cannot be achieved.

Criticism paves the way for creative activity :

They are more within the control of the critical power. Criticism tends to make an intellectual situation which the creative power can make use of. It tends to establish an order of ideas, and these new ideas reach society. The touch of truth is the touch of life and there is stir and growth everywhere, out of which the epochs (or periods) of creative literature take their birth. The poet ought to know life and the world before dealing with them in poetry. These are quite complex things in the modern world. Hence, the creation of a modern poet implies a great critical effort behind it, otherwise it would be a very poor, barren, and short-lived affair. That is why Byron's poetry is barren, and Goethe's is nourished by great and true material. Goethe knew life and world much better than Byron did. The literature of the first quarter of the nineteenth century is immature in spite of the fact that there was plenty of creative force and plenty of energy. The reason is that the writers did not have sufficient data, and material to work with ; they had not sufficient knowledge of books. That makes Byron so empty of matter,

Shelley so incoherent, and Wordsworth so incomplete and lacking in variety. Geothe, whom Wordsworth dispraised, was a greater man of letters because he was a well-read man.

It may not be misunderstood that reading of books alone gives that power. Shelley and Coleridge had plenty of reading while Pindar and Sophocles had not many books; and Shakespeare was no deep reader. And still Pindar, Sophocles and Shakespeare are far greater men of letters than Shelley and Byron. But there was a national glow of life in the periods of great poets. In the Greece of Pindar and Sophocles and in the England of Shakespeare, the poets lived in a current of ideas which nourished them in the highest degree for creative power. Society was permeated by fresh thought, that was intelligent and alive. When this atmosphere is lacking, books and reading may enable a man to construct a familiar kind of atmosphere in the mind which may not be as great as the real national atmosphere, but still it is a substitute for it. For Goethe there was no national glow of life as it existed in Athens of Pericles or England of Elizabeth. But there was a culture and a critical faculty among the Germans which Goethe had imbibed, and this was equivalent of that atmosphere. In the England of the first quarter of the 19th century both these factors were lacking and hence the creative poetry was of an inferior kind.

Disinterested love of a free, play of the mind is the essence of Criticism :

Burke was a great thinker. He lived above party politics and moved in a world of ideas. After writing a good deal against French Revolution he concludes his book by saying that it is such a movement that those who will try to resist it in the future will vainly try to resist the decrees of God. It is a wonderful quality to go against one's own cherished ideas, and it is an un-English quality. The Englishman is bowed down by political customs and follows the long-established customs. He is extremely conservative, and values what is political and practical so much that ideas are disliked by him. He hates ideas and thinkers because they often meddle with politics and practice. With him practice is

everything, and a free-play of the mind is nothing. But in fact a free-play of the mind is pleasure in itself. without which a nation's spirit dies out. It is this disinterested love of a free-play of the mind on all subjects, for its own sake, which is the essence of real criticism. It is an instinct which prompts the critic to know the best that is known and thought in the world.

Tendencies for freethinking and criticism appearing in England :

Periods of concentration are followed by periods of expansion. Such an epoch (period) of expansion is opening in England. First, the forcible pressure of foreign ideas upon the practice of Englishmen has disappeared. Secondly, with the long peace the ideas of Europe are finding their way into the minds of Englishmen. Thirdly, the material progress and comforts have led man to think what to do next, and he has begun to think of the free activity of the mind. There are flutterings of curiosity which have appeared among the English nation and it is in these that criticism must look to find its account. Criticism comes first and creative activity next. A time of true creative activity is preceded by a time of criticism.

Criticism should have the quality of disinterestedness :

In order to be fruitful, criticism should have the quality of disinterestedness. It should keep aloof from "the practical view of things." Its business is simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world and by making this known to create a current of true and fresh ideas. It should do it with honesty and ability, and it should leave alone all questions of practical consequences. But this is what is wanting in England. Its organs (magazines) of criticism are organs of men and parties having practical ends to serve. These practical ends are the first thing, and a free-play of the mind the second, *e.g. Edinburgh Review* (an organ of the Whigs), *Quarterly Review* (organ of the Tories), *British Quarterly Review* (organ of Dissenters), *The Times* (organ of the well-to-do Englishmen) are all run on these lines of party politics. But a true criticism is independent of these

things. The business of true criticism is to create a current of true and fresh ideas.

Practical criticism makes man blind to imperfection :

Criticism accomplished very little in England because it has not detached itself from practice and it has entered into quarrels and controversies. Such a practical criticism makes men blind even to the ideal imperfection of their own practice. It has a narrowing and injurious effect. For example, Sir Charles Alderly says to the farmers that the English race is the best under the sun, and Mr. Roebuck says to cutlers that there is nowhere such security in the world as it is enjoyed in England. But we must keep Goethe's ideal before us. He says that the little that is done is nothing as compared to what we have still to do.

The critics have to go against the stream of practical men :

It may be objected that this is a slow and obscure work. But it has to be slow and obscure, if it is to be a proper criticism. It is just like saying that whoever tries to see things as they really are, will find himself one of a very small circle ; but it is only this small minority that resolutely do their work and propagate adequate ideas. The critic refuses to lend himself of the point of view of the practical man. He must keep himself out of the region of immediate practice in the political, social, and humanitarian spheres. The common people are so much stuck up in practical life that they think that truth and culture can also be reached by the process of this practical life. There is a good deal of talk about the pursuit of truth but very little achievement by following these methods. Goethe says, "To act is easy, to think is so hard." The critic may have temptations to go with the stream and to make one of the party movement. But the critic's duty is to refuse to go along with stream.

Criticism must maintain its independence of the practical spirit and its aims. It must not hurry on to the goal because of its practical importance. It must be patient and mould itself according to the spiritual needs. It must praise and study elements that are wanted for spiritual

considerations, and it must reject those elements which are spiritually harmful but which may be practically useful.

Disinterested mode of seeing :

Some reformers lament that ardour and enthusiasm has gone out of young men which was to be found twenty years ago. The cause of this is that things were long seen from a practical point of view and now there is a pause. The benefits of that mode have been exhausted. Let us now try a more disinterested mode of seeing them; let us concentrate on the life of the mind and spirit. Let us think of quietly enlarging our stock of true and fresh ideas, and not making a fuss when we have caught only half an idea.

The subject-matter of literary criticism :

The law of criticism is that it should make a disinterested effort to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas. The English critic of literature must be in touch with the foreign ideas. Knowledge and ever-fresh knowledge must be the critic's great concern for himself. He should communicate that fresh knowledge to others and pass his own judgment along with it. But sometimes he has to establish an author's place in literature, the work is of pure judgment, and fresh knowledge is out of the question. Here the safeguard should be that he should never be abstract and he should always be alive to the truth of what he is saying.

Europe as one great confederation :

It may be objected against this point of view that critics and criticism are concerned mostly with the current English literature of the day. Arnold is not prepared to mould his definition for these people. His definition of criticism is : "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world". He asserts that very little current English literature comes under this. He advocates that critics must learn one more foreign literature apart from their own. The criticism with which he is concerned is a criticism which regards Europe

as one great confederation for intellectual and spiritual purposes. A knowledge of Greek, Roman and Eastern languages is essential. That modern nation will most progress in intellectual and spiritual spheres which carries out this programme.

If this is followed, the writers will have a joyful sense of creative activity instead of producing a poor, starved, fragmentary and unsuitable kind of creation.

NOTES

Paragraph 1. **Ventured**—attempted. **Endeavour**—effort. **Impaired**—damaged. **Rejoinder**—an answer to a reply. **Assigned**—put forth ; gave. **Excessive**—too much. *Expl.* : **And asserted the......effort**—and they held the point of view that creative effort is by its nature far superior to the work of a critic *i.e.*, producing something new, such as poetry, drama, novel, etc. This kind of effort in any branch of literature is superior to criticising the works of other writers. This is the reply given to Matthew Arnold by other people. **Profoundest**—deepest. **Disparagement**—dispraise. **To justify every......it**—*i.e.*, these words seem to look down upon the business of the critic and give every kind of dispraise to his work.

Paragraph 2. **Prosecute their inglorious employment**—carry on their hateful business. **Genuine**—true and pure.

Paragraph 3. **Elaborate**—detailed.

Paragraph 4. **Infinitely lower than the inventive**—much inferior to the work of original writing. **Consumed**—spent. **Critiques**—works of criticism. **Malicious criticism**—critical remarks which are passed out of ill-will. **Stupid invention**—foolish kind of original writing.

Paragraph 5. **Voluntarily doom himself to impotence**—condemn himself by his own will to do nothing. **Obscurity**—remaining an unknown person. **In another**—*i e.*, in the field of criticism. **Addicted**—literally it means to be in the habit of intoxicating oneself. Here it means given over to. *Expl.* : **That the critical......inventive**—that the power for

writing criticism is inferior to the writing of original things in literature. **Baneful**—destructive ; having a bad effect. **Johnson**—Dr. Samuel Johnson (1700—1764) a great English critic. Author of the first English Dictionary. Some of his important books are : **Lives of the Poets, Vanity of Human Wishes, Rasselas, Dictionary, Ecclesiastical Sonnets**—sonnets about religious subjects. **Celebrated Preface**—the preface to his famous and epoch-making book. **Prelude**, published in 1791, in which Wordsworth explains the aims of poetry. It is a finest piece of criticism. **Goethe**—Johann Wolfgang Vone Goethe (1749—1832), German poet, critic, and dramatist. His important books are **Sorrows of Werther** and **Faust.**

Paragraph 6. **Assenting**—agreeing. **Undeniable**—sure and certain. **Epochs**—periods. **Vainly spent**—uselessly spent. **Creative power**—the power to create original kind of writing in any branch of literature, *e.g.*, poems, plays, novels, etc. **Manifestation**—display ; appearance. **Accessible**—that which is available. **Creative literary genius**—an able man of letters who produces new literature. **Principally**—chiefly. **Synthesis**—combining together. **Exposition**—explaining, making clear. **Analysis**—analysing a thing and studying in detailed parts. **Dealing divinely**—dealing in such a way as if one is inspired by God. **Creative epochs**—periods when original literature was abundantly produced. **Concur**—agree. **Power of the moment**—influence of the period.

Paragraph 7. **Thus it tends......itself**—Thus, criticism can create an intellectual atmosphere which can usefully be availed of by men of original genius, such as poets, playwrights and novelists, etc., *i.e.*, criticism prepares the necessary ground and intellectual atmosphere for men of letters. **Displaces**—removes the one set of ideas and puts the new ones in their place.

Paragraph 8. **Quit these considerations**—leaving aside these points. **Apt**—Likely. **Impalpable**—not easily understood. *Expl.* : **Implies a great......it**—it shows that at the back of it there is a good deal of work done by criticism. **Nourished**—fed. **Comprehensively**—understanding a vast field.

Paragraph 9. **Burst of creative activity**—the sudden appearance of great literature in a flood. **Premature**—unripe. **Doomed**—fated. **Sanguine hopes**—cheerful hopes and expectations. **Prematureness**—the quality of being unripe, inexperienced. **Did not know enough**—the poets had not made a thorough study of the previous literature. **Incoherent**—lacking consistency, *i.e.*, one part does not agree with another. **Profound**—deep. **Disparaged**--dispraised.

Paragraph 10. **Pindar...(522—422 B.C.)**.—the eminent lyric poet of ancient Greece. He was the originator of the Ode, known after him as the Pindaric Ode. **Sophocles**—(945—406 B.C.) Greek dramatist of Athens. Some of his best books are *Electra*, *Aedipus*, *Philoctets*. **Glibly**—fluently. **Discernment**—understanding. **Import**—meaning. **Animating**—giving life and literary food. **Permeated by**—thoroughly filled with. *Expl.* **Even when this does...work**—Even when this kind of literary atmosphere is not present, books and reading can construct an atomsphere in the mind which resembles this atmosphere. **Nationally diffused life**—the living atomosphere of literature which is spread in the whole nation. **Epochs of Sophocles and Shakespeare**—the periods in which Sophocles and Shakespeare lived. **Sustaining**—life-giving. **Athens of Pericles**—Athens was a city state of Greece. It was at the height of glory and learning at the time when Pericles ruled it. During his reign Sophocles wrote his plays. **England of Elizabeth**—*i.e.*, when Shakespeare wrote his plays. **Unfettered thinking**—freethinking.

Paragraph 11. **Burke**—Edmund Burke (1729—1797), a statesman and orator. Some of his famous books are *Sublime* and *Beautiful*, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and Speech on the Impeachment of Warren Hastings*. **Accident**—chance. **Epoch of concentration**—a period when a few books are written but they are thorough-going works. **Epoch of expansion**—a period when a large number of authors produce their works. **Enraged**—got angry. **Enchanted**—charmed. **Catchwords**—slogans ; words which become popular for shouting. *Expl.* **So far was......mankind**—He was not at all the man devoted blindly to his party. There are some people who give so much loyalty to their

party as they should give to all mankind. **Invectives**—bitter attacks. **Conviction**—strong belief. **Combating it**—fighting against it.

Paragraph 12. **Persist**—continue obstinately. **Decrees of Providence**—the ordinances of God. **Perverse**—sticking obstinately to an error. *Expl.* **If a great chance……obstinate**—Burke after criticising the ideas of the French Revolution concludes his book by admitting that the revolution for democracy is a natural movement and those who will resist it in the future will vainly try to resist the commands of God.

Paragraph 13. **Balaam**—Balaam Bin Baoor—the prophet who came to curse but remained to bless.

Paragraph 14. **Anomaly**—absurd. *Expl.* : **For the Englishman……it whatever**—the Englishman is extremely practical-minded. Typical persons of this sort are the members of the Parliament who believe strongly that even though a thing may be absolutely foolish, this is no hindrance to believing in it. **Certain miscreants**—some wretched persons. He gives this bad name to the philosophers of the French Revolution. **Assuming**—taking. **Presumed**—supposed. **Transported**—taken away. **Meddling rashly**—interfering rashly. **Notion**—idea ; conception. **Compensations**—rewards. **Inanition**—emptiness especially from want of nourishment. **Disparaging one**—a meaning of dispraise. **Intrusion**—forcing a thing unnecessarily. **Benumbing period of blight**—a period during which this tendency is to become cold and dead. **Suppression**—being suppressed and crushed.

Paragraph 15. *Expl.* **in the first………disappeared**—first, there is no danger that foreign ideas will be thrust upon our minds by a pressure as the enemy exerts. **We being to wear….. loosely**—we are feeling quite easy in our minds can entertain any thoughts that we like. **Amicably**—peacefully. **Mingle**—mix up. **Infinitesimally small**—extremely small. **Brutalising**—cruel. **Passionate material progress**—the warm progress in the sphere of material comforts. **Indisputable**—sure and certain. **Apparition**—appearance. **Privilege**—advantage. **Discern**—see ; consider. **Tend to beget an inclination**—all combine to give

up the tendency. **Flutterings of curiosity**—there is a movement of ideas. *Expl*: **Criticism first......its work**—Arnold proves that criticism comes first and the creative activity afterwards. Criticism prepares the necessary background for original writing.

Paragraph 16. **Resolutely**—firmly. **Ulterior**—looking to something beyond. **Inflexible honesty**—unbending honesty. **Consequence**—results. **Prominence**—importance. **Bane**—injurious effect. **It is that practical... stifle it**—It is this bad effect that practical considerations stick to it and kill it. **Organs**—journals and magazines. *Expl*: **So much play of...is wanted**—our magazines believe in having so much of free-play of the mind only as it suits their practical ends. **Revue des deux Modes**—a French Review (an organ of criticism). The literal meaning of this French phrase is the Review of the two worlds. **Extinction**—ceasing to be published. **Subserve**—serve as means to a set purpose.

Paragraph 17. **Detached itself**—kept itself aloof. **Polemical**—having a fighting and quarrelling nature. **Controversial**—entering into lengthy discussions. **Retarding**—slowing down the progress. **Vulgarising**—making vulgar *i.e.*, making our tastes low and rough. **A practical criticism**—a criticism which has a fighting quality and is devoted to practical ends. **Makes men blind......practice**—make people blind to the defects in their own practice. **Makes them willingly...perfection**—they begin to declare gladly that their practice is the best, even though it may have several defects. **Baneful**—harmful. **Reassured**—made to feel certain. **Speculative considerations**—thoughtful ideas.

Paragraph 18. **The absence of......climate**—because the climate of our country does not pull down the energies.

Paragraph 19. **Unrivalled**—which has no rivals or comparison.

Paragraph 20. **Peril**—danger. **Exuberant self-satisfaction**—overbursting satisfaction about ourselves. **Until we find...city**—until we die and enter paradise. **Das wenige, etc., etc.**,—German quotation from Goethe, its

meaning is given by Arnold in the next line within inverted commas.

Paragraph 21. **Subtle**—deep. **The Indian virtue of detachment**—adopting this quality of the Indian Sadhus to keep ourselves aloof. **Ardent zeal**—great enthusiasm. **Inadequate ideas**—unsuitable ideas. **Reposes**—rests. **Dizzying and attracting effect**—an effect which turns the head and attracts. **Collected spectators**—cool-minded onlookers. **Tend to draw him......vortex**—it tends to have its bad influence on him also. **Remaining collected**—keeping aloof. **Perpetually**—permanently.

Paragraph 22. **Humanitarian sphere**—the sphere of rendering service to human beings. **Speculative treatment**—treating everything according to his ideas and according to his philosophy. **Irresistible manner**—such a forceful and effective manner that nobody can resist these ideas.

Paragraph 23. **Indisposed**—inclined. **To comprehend**—to understand. **Immersed**—plunged in. **Impertinent singularity**—bad kind of quality. **Terrae filii**—sons of the soil. **Philistines**—pretenders of knowledge ; having little knowledge but pretending too much of it. **Intellectual delicacy** delicate ideas about mental attitude. **Applaud**—praise. **Occasional scandal**—sometimes there is an evil incidence which is propagated. *Expl*: **In this way...little thought**—if this is the way of arrining at truth (as given in the above statement of a person), then there will be a lot of talk but little achievement. There will be a chairman, a secretary etc. of these committees. **Terrai filii**—here it means a member of the party. **Ungracious**—not dignified or graceful. **Obermann**—the hero in the French writer Etienne de Sanancours's book. He is a sad, lonely figure, residing aloof in the valley of Jura in Switzerland.

Paragraph 24. **Asserting**—declaring ; stating. **Impoverishing**—taking away the life, having a starving effect. **Flexible**—mould itself according to circumstances. **Maleficent**—harmful. **Apt to discern**—in the habit of seeing. **Shortcomings**—defects ; limitations. **Illusions**—wrong ideas. **Beneficent**—useful.

Paragraph 25. **Want of ardour**—lack of enthusiasm. **Prepared to remodel......principles**—we were thinking of reforming them according to the original doctrines. **Spiritual flagging**—lack of interest in spiritual sphere. **Disposed**—inclined. **Ardent**—enthusiastic. *Expl* : **In inseparable connections......life**—the young men of the previous generation saw everything from the point of view of practical considerations and politics. **Serener**—more calm. **Maturing a little**—becoming a little more ripe (because we have been waiting patiently and have not been in a hurry to tell our raw ideas to others).

Paragraph 26. **The idea of a disinterested......ideas**—this is Arnold's definition of a right of criticism, and as such it may be carefully noted. **Significant**—full of meaning ; important, **Insensibly**—unconsciously. **Enunciation**—stating a position. **Intimate**—close. **Tautological**—self-evident truth.

Paragraph 27. **Allied practical considerations**—practical considerations which are quite foreign to its aims and objects. **One great consideration**—one great family of nations joined together. **Eastern antiquity**—ancient ideas of the Eastern nations.

Paragraph 28. **In no contemptible measure**—not in a hateful degree *i.e.*, in a decent way. **Fragmentary**—only broken parts being seized. **Inadequate**—insufficient; unsuitable. **And at some......possible**—at certain periods no other production of literature is possible than critical literature.

Paragraph 29. **Genuine creation**—sincere and original productions. **Underrate**—under-value. **Aeschylus**—a famous ancient Greek dramatist. **Pre-eminence**—importance. **Beckon**—summon ; call attention to. **Wilderness**—wild, desert place. **Contemporaries**—people of our own times. **Esteem**—get respect. **Posterity**—coming generations. *Expl.* **It will certainly......posterity**—surely it will give up the best right to get respect from the coming generations.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. 1. Arnold says, "The Englishman has been called a political animal, and he values what is political and prac-

tical so much that ideas easily become objects of dislike in his eyes." Discuss.

Ans. Arnold explains that the English nation has been too long devoted to practical ideals and criticism has never fulfilled its real function, least of all during the century when Arnold wrote. The Englishmen judge everything on political and practical considerations. The average Englishman is like a Member of the Parliament who thinks that there is no objection to believing in a thing which may be absolutely absurd. Many of the English writers looked upon such a far-reaching movement, as the French Revolution, as a mere rebellion of the common people and called the revolutionary thinkers as miscreants. Their journals and magazines were wedded to party politics. They never offered any free criticism, but they were subservient to the cause of the parties to which they belonged. For example, *The Edinburgh Review* was the organ of the Whigs and it allowed freethinking only to such an extent as suited its own party politics. *The Quarterly Review* was the mouthpiece of Tories, the *British Quarterly Review* that of the Dissenters, and the *The Times* reflected the opinions of the well-to-do Englishmen. They all allowed as much of free-thinking as was compatible with their party requirements, and nothing more.

A common attitude of the people who are engaged in criticism is to back up their own parties and to decry the others. They declare that they are all the sons of the soil, that is, partisans in a cause. They are all Philistines (*i.e.*, pretenders to knowledge) and they think that the only way of attaining truth is to follow the methods of the Philistines. They start social movements and stick to each other in all reasonable or unreasonable things. They consider independent criticism as mere nonsense, and do not believe in intellectual delicacy. They do not bother about foreign thought or the methods of criticism followed abroad. They have their motto: "If one of us speaks well, applaud him; if one of us speaks ill, applaud him too; we are all in the same movement; we are all liberals, we are all in pursuit of truth." Now this is not the way of arriving at genuine criticism. Arnold remarks that in such

movements there may be a chairman, a secretary, and advertisements; excitement may be occasionally caused by some sort of a scandal; in general, there will be plenty of fuss but very little thought.

Arnold raises a cry of protest against this attitude of his countrymen. He holds up a high ideal of criticism before them. He insists that England is not all the world and English ideas are not necessarily the best. The Englishmen have been very conservative, and hence, all the more need for coming in contact with the ideas of other European countries. He even advocates that an English critic must study the ancient Eastern literatures. He must know the Greek and Roman languages and study the critical thought all over Europe. Arnold's definition of criticism is that it is a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world. He lays stress on freethinking. The business of the critic is to refuse to go along with the stream of common ideas. He should discover new idea and bring other people in touch with it. His role is to prepare the ground for creative activity. In fact, he lays a solid foundation of thought and study in which creative activity rests. Each period of critical thought is followed by an outburst of original literary productions.

Arnold has rightly diagnosed the cause and suggested the remedy. The literary atmosphere of his times was infested with a polemical spirit (*i.e.*, a fighting atmosphere), in which each critical journal attacked the writers that belonged to the opposite camp. Arnold held a beacon light for the guidance of critics and rendered a valuable service to the critical thought in England.

Q. 2. Arnold quotes his objectors who say that "The critical power is of lower rank than the creative." How far is this opinion sound and what is the true position of criticism ?

Ans. It has been often held that creative activity, of whatever quality, is always superior to the critical work *i.e.*, producing original piece of literature in any branch

whether it is of a good or bad quality, is better than criticising the works of others. Even though Wordsworth had himself made a rich contribution to critical thought in the Preface to his *Prelude* yet he is quoted by Arnold as saying that the critical power holds a very low position as compared to the inventive power. Arnold asks, is it fair that a man who is not capable of producing good effect in one branch of literature should condemn himself not to try his hand in another *i e.*, in literary criticism ?

Next, it may be admitted for a short while that the creative power holds a high position in literary productions, but its function is that man finds his true happiness in it. But it is undeniable that other men find true happiness in doing social service, and still others by criticising the works of other authors. Criticism holds a position equally respectable, as the creative activity. Let us look at the function and achievements of criticism. It is a well-known fact that all epochs are not equally fruitful in literary productions. The Greece of Pericles and England of Elizabeth's times were exceptionally great in original literary production while there are many epochs which were altogether barren. During these barren periods the foundations we laid by criticism for the next literary outburst. In the times of Sophocles and Shakespeare the atmosphere was saturated with great ideas. There was a national glow that permeated (thoroughly filled) every sphere of activity. This made it possible for them to achieve their great task when this atmosphere is lacking, books and study take its place and create in the minds a semblance of that atmosphere. Books and study are the raw materials of critical thought. They make the man cultured ; and mature criticism gives a polish to their thoughts, and hence it serves an important ingredient in the production of any good literature. Arnold gives a specific example. The first quarter of the nineteenth century saw a great outburst of literature in England. But most of the writers suffer from immaturity (unripeness) of thought. The cause of this was they had not made a proper study of the previous literature, nor had they applied their minds in a critical endeavour to find out the right standards. Hence, creative activity and criticism go hand in hand.

Arnold further points out that the work of the literary genius is synthesis and exposition, not analysis and discovery. "Its gift lies in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere; by a certain order of ideas, when it finds itself in them; of dealing divinely with these ideas, presenting them in the most attractive combination—making beautiful works with them, in short." There are two factors essential for the production of great work of art—the powers of the man, and the powers of the moment. If the latter are absent even a great man of genius will not be able to attain much. Thus, even creative literature is handicapped by factors external to the genius of the man. This is not the case with the critic.

Hence, to pass a sweeping judgement that creative activity is by for superior to critical thought is erroneous. Criticism is the custodian of free thought, and as such it holds a respectable position in the field of literature.

Q. 3 In the light of Arnold's definition, discuss what are the functions of Criticism.

Ans. Arnold defines criticism as a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world. Each of these words is significant, and guards against the pitfall into which the work of critics is likely to fall or it guides him to hold the highest standard of search for truth before him. It has been commonly supposed that criticism merely points out the defects in a literary piece or in a man of letters, or otherwise a critic is supposed to belong to a certain party and lends support to its aims and objects whether they are right or wrong. Both these conceptions are highly erroneous. The business of the critic is to steer clear of party-politics and to be engaged in a disinterested and noble pursuit of the best ideas which should serve to enlarge the minds of men of letters and pave the way of highest creative activity. This is the sum and substance of Arnold's plea. Let us now examine his ideas in detail.

Arnold laments that the organs of criticism of his time are devoted to party-politics and have practical considera-

tion before them which are uppermost. They consider the search for truth and a dispassionate judgment as a subsidiary object. *Edinburgh Review* was the organ of the Whigs, *The Quarterly Review* of the Tories, *The British Quarterly Review* represented the Dissenters, and *The Times* the rich middle classes of England. There is a lot of fuss but little of achievement. Arnold sounds a note of warning against this tendency and pleads that true criticism is independent of party-politics and practical considerations. The business of true criticism is to create a current of fresh ideas, to propagate them fearlessly and he raises the standards of literary taste. It should keep aloof from the practical view of things. That is what he means by disinterestedness. He goes a step further to state that the critics have rather to go against the stream of political considerations. The critic must refuse to lend himself to the point of view of the practical man. He must keep himself out of the region of immediate practice in the political, social and humantarian spheres. He should be only concerned with truth and culture. He must be patient and mould himself according to spiritual needs. He must reject all that goes against spiritual values though it may have high practical utility.

Arnold regrets to say that the Englishman has fallen into the ruts of conservative ideas. He hates all new and fresh ideas and he does not welcome the ideas coming from abroad. He is much devoted to the long established customs. He values what is political and practical so much that all ideas are hateful to him. With him practice is everything and a free-play of the mind is nothing. Arnold holds that this order should be reversed—free-play of the minds is the first and foremost duty of the critic and old-established practice means nothing to him. He says that a free-play of the mind is a pleasure in itself and a nation that is devoid of it loses all sense of spiritual values. Disinterested love of a free-play of the mind on all subjects, for its own sake, is the essence of real criticism. It is an instinct which prompts to the critic to know the best that is known and thought in the world. If we examine this high standard of criticism advocated by Arnold, we come to the conclusion that it is the only right way of looking at the function of the

critic and criticism. All party bickering, grouping of literary men according to selfish ties, deriding the works of writers who belong to the opposite camp and satires prompted by personal motives would vanish, if Arnold's standard is followed. Arnold removes great misunderstanding prevailing not only among the common people but even among such literary figures as Wordsworth. It was believed that the work of the critic is inferior to the creative activity of man of letters. It was thought that he merely criticizes while the original genius creates something new. Even though there may be a good deal of truth in this statement, yet. Arnold points out the useful foundations laid by criticism on which all creative activity rests. Arnold shows that criticism paves the way for creative activity. He points out that all periods are not favourable for productions of original works of art. The reason for this is that two forces are at work for the achievement of this end—the power of the movement and the power of the man. The former implies an atmosphere of culture, an epoch of unusual national glow which is favourable for creative activity. If this is missing, nothing great can be produced by the power of the man alone. It was on account of this power of the epoch that the Elizabethan England produced a man like Shakespeare and Athens of Pericles gave birth to Pindar and Sophocles. When this atmosphere is wanting, the critic prepares the ground and through the profound study of books he builds an atmosphere of culture in the imagination which acts as a substitute. This kind of culture and critical faculty was present among the Germans who produced a great literary figure like Goethe. Arnold further says that this was lacking in England of the early 19th century and hence the poetry of that period is inferior in quality with all the outbursts of the romantic revival. With such literary giants as Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron, the literature of the early 19th century remains immature, unripe and incomplete. The obvious reason is that there was no grounding in high critical standards, no profound study of books and no maturity of thought. Thus Arnold assigns a rightful place to the work of the critic.

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THE STUDY OF POETRY*

"The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialised itself in the fact, in the supposed fact: it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything ; rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea ; the idea *is* the fact. The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry."[1]

Let me be permitted to quote these words of my own, as uttering the thought which should, in my opinion, go with us and govern us in all our study of poetry. In the present work it is the course of one great contributory stream to the world-river of poetry that we are invited to follow. We are here invited to trace the stream of English poetry. But whether we set ourselves, as here, to follow only one of the several streams that make the mightly river of poetry, whether we seek to know them all, our governing thought should be the same. We should conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive of it. We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto; More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete ;

*1. Published in 1880 as the General Introduction to *The English Poets*, edited by T. H. Ward.

and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science, I say, will appear incomplete without it. For finely and truly does Wordsworth call poetry "the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science"; and what is a countenance without its expression ? Again, Wordsworth finely and truly calls poetry "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge": our religion, parading evidences such as those on which the popular mind relies now; our philosophy pluming itself on its reasonings about causation and finite and infinite being; what are they but the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge? The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them, for having taken them seriously; and the more we perceive their hollowness, the more we shall prize "the breath and finer spirit of knowledge" offered to us by poetry.

But if we conceive thus highly of the destinies of poetry, we must also set our standard for poetry high, since poetry to be capable of fulfilling such high destinies, must be poetry of a high order of excellence. We must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgment. Sainte-Beuve relates that Napoleon one day said, when somebody was spoken of in his presence as a charlatan : "Charlatan as much as you please; but where is there *not* charlatanism?"—"Yes," answers Sainte-Beuve, "in politics in the art of governing mankind, that is perhaps true. But in the order of thought, in art, the glory, the eternal honour is that charlatanism shall find no entrance; herein lies the inviolableness of that noble portion of man's being." It is admirably said, and let us hold fast to it. In poetry, which is thought and art in one, it is the glory, the eternal honour, that charlatanism shall find no entrance; that this noble sphere be kept inviolate and inviolable. Charlatanism is for confusing or obliterating the distinctions between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true. It is charlatanism conscious or unconscious, whenever we confuse or obliterate these. And in poetry, more than anywhere else, it is unpermissible to confuse or obliterate them. For in poetry

the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance. It is of paramount importance because of the high destinies of poetry. In poetry, as criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find, we have said, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay. But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true.

The best poetry is what we want; the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can. A clearer, deeper sense of the best in poetry, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, is the most precious benefit which we can gather from a poetical collection such as the present. And yet in the very nature and conduct of such a collection there is inevitably something which tends to obscure in us the consciousness of what our benefit should be, and to distract us from the pursuit of it. We should therefore steadily set it before our minds at the outset, and should compel ourselves to revert constantly to the thought of it as we proceed.

Yes : constantly, in reading poetry, a sense for the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, should be present in our minds and should govern our estimate of what we read. But this real estimate, the only true one, is liable to be superseded, if we are not watchful, by two other kinds of estimate, the historic estimate and the personal estimate, both of which are fallacious. A poet or a poem may count to us historically, they may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves, and they may count to us really. They may count to us historically. The course of development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry, is profoundly interesting and by regarding a poet's work as a stage in this course of development we may easily bring ourselves to make it of more importance as poetry than in itself it really is, we may come to use a language of

quite exaggerated praise in criticising it, in short, to overrate it. So arises in our poetic judgments the fallacy caused by the estimate which we may call historic. Then, again, a poet or a poem may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, likings, and circumstances have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance. Here also we overrate the object of our interest, and apply to it a language of praise which is quite exaggerated. And thus we get the source of a second fallacy in our poetic judgments—the fallacy caused by an esitmate we may call personal.

Both fallacies are natural. It is evident how naturally the study of the history and development of a poetry may incline a man to pause over reputations and works once conspicuous but now obscure, and to quarrel with a careless public for skipping, in obedience to mere tradition and habit from one famous name or work in its national poetry to another, ignorant of what it misses, and of the reason for keeping what it keeps, and of the whole process of growth in its poetry. The French have become diligents of their own early poetry, which they long neglected ; the study makes many of them dissatisfied with their so-called classical poetry, the court-tragedy of the seventh century, a poetry which Pellisson long ago reproached with its want of the true poetic stamp, with its *Politesse sterlie et rampante*, but which nevertheless has reigned in France as absolutely as if it had been the perfection of classical poetry indeeh. The dissatisfaction is natural ; yet a lively and accomplished critic, M. Charles d' Hericault, the editor of 'Clement Marot', goes too far when he says that "the cloud of glory playing round a classic is a mist as dangerous to the future of a literature as it is intolerable for the purposes of history." "It hinders," he goes on, "it hinders us from seeing more than one single point, the culminating and exceptional point; the summary, fictitious and arbitrary, of a thought and of a work. It substitutes a halo for a physiognomy, it puts a statue where there was once a man

and, hiding from us all trace of the labour, the attempts, the weaknesses, the failures, it claims not study but veneration; it does not show us how the thing is done, it imposes upon us a model. Above all, for the historian his creation of classic personages is inadmissible ; for it withdraws the poet from his time, from his proper life, it breaks historical relationships, it blinds criticism by conventional admiration, and renders the investigation of literary origins unacceptable. It gives us a human personage no longer, but a God seated immovable amidst His perfect work, like Jupiter on Olympus ; and hardly will it be possible for the young student, to whom such work is exhibited at such a distance from him, to believe that it did not issue ready-made from that divine head."

All this is brilliantly and tellingly said, but we must plead for a distinction. Everything depends on the reality of a poet's classic character. If he is a dubious classic, let us sift him ; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best (for this is the true and right meaning of the word *classic, classical*), then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character. This is what is salutary, this is what is formative ; this is the great benefit to be got from the study of poetry. Everything which interferes with it, which hinders it, is injurious. True, we must read our classic with open eyes, and not with eyes blinded with superstition ; we must perceive when his work comes short, when it drops out of the class of the very best, and we must rate it, in such cases, at its proper value. But the use of this negative criticism is not in itself, it is entirely in its enabling us to have a clearer sense and a deeper enjoyment of what is truly excellent. To trace the labour, the attempts, the weaknesses, the failures of a genuine classic, to acquaint oneself with his time and his life and his historical relationships, is mere literary dilettantism unless it has that clear sense and deeper enjoyment for its end. It may be said

that the more we know about a classic the better we shall enjoy him ; and, if we lived as long as Methuselah and had all of us heads of perfect clearness and wills of perfect steadfastness, this might by true in fact as it is plausible in theory. But the case here is much the same as the case with the Greek and Latin studies of our schoolboys. The elaborate philological groundwork which we require them to lay is in theory an admirable preparation for appreciating the Greek and Latin authors worthily. The more thoroughly we lay the groundwork, the better we shall be able, it may be said, to enjoy the authors. True, if time were not so short, and schoolboys' wits not so soon tired and their power of attention exhausted ; only, as it is, the elaborate philological preparation goes on, but the authors are little known and less enjoyed. So with the investigator of "historic origins" in poetry. He ought to enjoy the true classic all the better for his investigations ; he often is distracted from the enjoyment of the best, and with the less good he overbusies himself, and is prone to overrate it in proportion to the trouble which it has cost him.

The idea of tracing historic origins and historical relationships cannot be absent from a compilation like the present. And naturally the poets to be exhibited in it will be assigned to those persons for exhibition who are known to prize them highly, rather than to those who have no special inclination towards them. Moreover, the very occuption with an author, and the business of exhibiting him, disposes us to affirm and amplify his importance. In the present work, therefore, we are sure of frequent tempation to adopt the historic estimate, or the personal estimate, and to forget the real estimate ; which latter, nevertheless, we must employ if we are to make poetry yield us its full benefit. So high is that benefit, the benefit of clearly feeling and of deeply enjoying the really excellent, the truly classic in poetry, that we do well, I say, to set it fixedly before our minds as our object in studying poets and poetry, and to make the desire of attaining it the one principle to which, as the *Imitation* says, whatever we may read or come to know, we always return. *Cum multa legeris et cognoveris, ad unum semper oportet redire principium.*

The historic estimate is likely in especial to affect our judgment and our language when we are dealing with ancient poets ; the personal estimate when we are dealing with poets our contemporaries, or at any rate modern. The exaggerations due to the historic estimate are not in themselves, perhaps, of very much gravity. Their report hardly enters the general ear ; probably they do not always impose even on the literary men who adopt them. But they lead to a dangerous abuse of language. So we hear Caedmon, amongst our own poets, compared to Milton. I have already noticed the enthusiasm of one accomplished French critic for "historic origins." Another eminent French critic, M. Vitet, comments upon that famous document of the early poetry of his nation, the *Chansoh de Roland*. It is indeed a most interesting document. The *joculator* or *jongleur* Taillefer, who was with William the Conqueror's army at Hastings, marched before the Norman troops, so said the tradition, singing "of Charlemagne and of Roland of Oliver, and of the vassals who died at Roncevaux" ; and it is suggested that in the *Chanson de Roland* by one Turoldus or Theroulde, a poem preserved in a manuscript of the twelfth century in the Bodleian Libray at Oxford, we have certainly the matter, perhaps even some of the words of the chant which Tailiefer sang. The poem has vigour and freshness ; it is not without pathos. But M. Vitet is not satisfied with seeing in it a document of some poetic value, and of very high historic and linguistic value ; he sees in it a grand and beautiful work, a monument of epic genius. In its general design he finds the grandiose conception, in its details he finds the constant union of simplicity with greatness, which are the marks, he truly says, of the genuine epic, and distinguish it from the artificial epic of literary ages. One thinks of Homer ; this is the sort of praise which is given to Homer, and justly given. Higher praise there cannot well be, and it is the praise due to epic poetry of the highest order only, and to no other. Let us try, then, the *Chanson de Roland* at its best. Roland, mortally wounded, lays himself down under

a pine-tree, with his face turned towards Spain and the enemy :—

> "De plusurs choses a remembrer li prist,
> De tantes teres cume li bers cunquist,
> De dulce France, des humes de sun lign,
> De Carlemagne sun seignor ki l' nurrit."*

That is primitive work, I repeat, with an undeniable poetic quality of its own. It deserves such praise, and such praise is sufficient for it. But now turn to Homer :—

> "So said she ; they long since in Earth's soft arms were reposing,
> There, in their own dear land, their fatherland, Lacedaemhne."
>
> *Iliad*, iii. 243, 244 (translated by Dr. Hawtrey).

We are here in another world, another order of poetry altogether ; here is rightly due such supreme praise as that which M. Vitet gives to the *Chanson de Roland.* If our words are to have any meaning, if our judgments are to have any solidity, we must not heap that supreme praise upon poetry of an order immeasurably inferior..

Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. Of course we are not to require this other poetry to resemble them ; it may be very dissimilar. But if we have any tact we shall find them, when we have lodged them well in our minds, an infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside them. Short passages, even single lines

*"Then began he to call many things to remembrance —all the lands which his valour conquered, and pleasant France, and the men of his lineage, and Charlemagne, his liege lord who nourished him."—*Chanson de Roland*, iii, 939-942.

will serve our turn quite sufficiently. Take the two lines which I have just quoted from Homer, the poet's comment on Helen's mention of her brothers ;—or take his

> "Ah, unhappy pair, why gave we you to King Peleus, to a mortal? But ye are without old age, and immortal. Was it that with men born in misery ye might have sorrow ?"—*Iliad*, xxii. 443-445.

—the address of Zeus to the horses of Peleus ;—or take finally this :—

> "Nay, and thou too, old man, in former days wast, as we hear, happy."—*Iliad*, xxiv. 543.

—the words of Achilles to Priam, a suppliant before him. Take that incomparable line and a half of Dante. Ugolino's tremendous words :—

> "Io no piangeva; si dentro impietral.[1]
> Piangevan elli."

Take the lovely words of Beatrice to Virgil[2]—

> "Io son fatta da Dio, sua merce, tale,
> Che la vostra miseria non mi tange,
> Ne fiammad' esto incendio non m' assale."

Take the simple, but perfect, single line[3]—

> "In la sua volontade e nostra pace."

Take of Shakespeare a line or two of Henry the Fourth's expostulation with sleep—

> "Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
> Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
> In cradle of the rude imperious surge..."

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[1]"I wailed not, so of stone grew I within ;—*they* wailed."—*Inferno* xxxiii. 39, 40.

[2]"Of such sort hath God, thanked be His mercy, made me, that your misery toucheth me not, neither doth the flame of this fire strike me."—*Inferno*. ii. 91-93.

[3]"In His will is our peace."—*Paradiso*, iii. 85.

And take, as well, Hamlet's dying request to Horatio—

> "If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
> To tell my story."

Take of Milton that Miltonic passage—

> "Darken'd so, yet shone
> Above them all the archangel ; but his face
> Deep scars of thunder had intrench'd and care
> Sat on his faded cheek."

Add two such lines as—

> "And courage never to submit or yield
> And what is else not to be overcome...."

and finish with the exquisite close to the loss of Proserpine, the loss :

> "which cost Ceres all that pain
> To seek her through the world."

These few lines, if we have tact and can use them, are enough even of themselves to keep clear and sound our judgments about poetry, to save us from fallacious estimates of it, to conduct us to a real estimate.

The specimens I have quoted differ widely from one another, but they have in common this : the possession of the very highest poetical quality. If we are thoroughly penetrated by their power, we shall find that we have acquired a sense enabling us, whatever poetry may be laid before us, to feel the degree in which a high poetical quality is present or wanting there. Critics give themselves great labour to draw out what in the abstract constitutes the characters of a high quality of poetry. It is much better simply to have recourse to concrete examples ;—to take specimens of poetry of the high, the very highest quality, and to say : The characters of a high quality of poetry are what is expressed *there*. They are far better recognised

by being felt in the verse of the master, than by being perused in the prose of the critic. Nevertheless if we are urgently pressed to give some critical account of them, we may safely, perhaps, venture on laying down, not indeed how and why the characters arise, but where and in what they arise. They are in the matter and substance of the poetry, and they are in its manner and style. Both of these, the substance and matter on the one hand, the style and manner on the other, have a mark, an accent, of high beauty, worth, and power. But if we are asked to define this mark and accent in the abstract, our answer must be : No, for we should thereby be darkening the question, not clearing it. The mark and accent are, as given by the substance and matter of that poetry, by the style and manner of that poetry, and of all other poetry which is akin to it in quality.

Only one thing we may add as to the substance and matter of poetry, guiding ourselves by Aristotle's profound observation that the superiority of poetry over history consists in its possessing a higher truth and a higher seriousness. Let us add, therefore, to what we have said, this : that the substance and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness. We may add yet further what is in itself evident, that to the style and manner of the best poetry their special character, their accent, is given by their diction, and, even yet more, by their movement. And though we distinguish between the two characters, the two accents of superiority, yet they are nevertheless vitally connected one with the other. The superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner. The two superiorities are closely related, and are in steadfast proportion one to the other. So far as high poetic truth and seriousness are wanting to a poet's matter and substance, so far also, we may be sure, will a high poetic stamp of diction and movement be wanting to his style and manner. In proportion as this high stamp of diction and movement, again, is absent from a poet's style

and manner, we shall find, also, that high poetic truth and seriousness are absent from his substance and matter.

So seated, these are but dry generalities ; their whole force lies in their application. And I could wish every student of poetry to make the application of them for himself. Made by himself, the application would impress itself upon his mind far more deeply than made by me. Neither will my limits allow me to make any full application of the generalities above propounded ; but in the hope of bringing out, at any rate, some significance in them, and of establishing an important principle more firmly by their means, I will, in the space which remains to me, follow rapidly from the commencement the course of our English poetry with them in my view.

Once more I return to the early poetry of France, with which our own poetry, in its origins, is indissolubly connected. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that seed-time of all modern language and literature, the poetry of France had a clear predominance in Europe. Of the two divisions of that poetry, its productions in the *langue d' oil* and its productions in the *langue d'oc*, the poetry of the *langue d'oc*, of southern France, of the troubadours, is of importance because of its effect on Italian literature ;--the first literature of modern Europe to strike the true and grand note, and to bring forth, as in Dante and Petrarch it brought forth, classics. But the predominance of French poetry in Europe, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is due to its poetry of the *langue d'oil*, the poetry of northern France and of the tongue which is now the French language. In the twelfth century the bloom of this romance-poetry was earlier and stronger in England, at the court of our Anglo-Norman kings, than in France itself. But it was a bloom of French poetry ; and as our native poetry formed itself, it formed itself out of this. The romance-poems which took possession of the heart and imagination of Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are French ; "they are," as Southey justly says, "the pride of French literature, nor have we anything which can be placed in competition with them." Themes were supplied from all quarters ; but

the romance-setting which was common to them all, and which gained the ear of Europe, was French. This constituted for the French poetry, literature and language, at the height of the Middle Age, an unchallenged predominance. The Italian Brunetto Latini, the master of Dante, wrote his *Treasure* in French because, he says, "la parleure en est plus delitable et plus commune a toutes gens." In the same century, the thirteenth, the French romance-writer, Christian of Troyes, formulates the ciaims, in chivalry and letters of France, his native country, as follows :—

"Or vous ert par ce livre apris,
Que Gresse ot de chevalerie
Le premier los et de clergie ;
Puis vint chevalerie a Rome,
Et de la clergie la some,
Qui ore est en France venue.
Diex doinst qu'ele i soit retenue,
Et que li lius li abelisse
Tant que de France n'isse
L'onor qui s'i est arestee !"

"Now by this book you will learn that first Greece had the renown for chivalry and letters : then chivalry and the primacy in letters passed to Rome, and now it is come to France. God grant it may be kept there ; and that the place may please it so well, that the honour which has come to make stay in France may never depart thence !)

Yet it is now all gone, this French romance-poetry, of which the weight of substance and the power of style are not unfairly represented by this extract from Christian of Troyes. Only by means of the historic estimate can we persuade ourselves now to think that any of it is of poetical importance.

But in the fourteenth century there comes an Englishman nourished on this poetry, taught his trade by this poetry, getting words, rhyme, metre from this poetry ; for even of that stanza which the Italians used, and which

Chaucer derived immediately from the Italians, the basis and suggestion was probably given in France. Chaucer (I have already named him) fascinated his contemporaries, but so too did Christian of Troyes and Wolfram of Eschenbach. Chaucer's power of fascination, however, is enduring; his poetical importance does not need the assistance of the historic estimate ; it is real. He is a genuine source of joy and strength, which is flowing still for us and will flow always. He will be read, as time goes on, more generally than he is read now. His language is a cause of difficulty for us ; but so also and I think in quite as great a degree, is the language of Burns. In Chaucer's case, as in that of Burns, it is a difficulty to be unhesitatingly accepted and overcome.

If we ask ourselves wherein consists the immense superiority of Chaucer's poetry over the romance-poetry—why it is that in passing from this to Chaucer we suddenly feel ourselves to be in another world, we shall find that his superiority is both in the substance of his poetry and in the style of his poetry. His superiority in substance is given by his large, free, simple, clear yet kindly view of human life,—so unlike the total want, in the romance poets, of all intelligent command of it. Chaucer has not their helplessness ; he has gained the power to survey the world from a central, a truly human point of view. We have only to call to mind the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. The right comment upon it is Dryden's : It is sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that *here is God's plenty*. And again : "He is a perpetual fountain of good sense." It is by a large, free, sound representation of things, that poetry, this high criticism of life, has truth of substance ; and Chaucer's poetry has truth of substance.

Of his style and manner, if we think first of the romance-poetry and then of Chaucer's divine liquidness of diction, his divine fluidity of movement, it is difficult to speak temperately. They are irresistible, and justify all the rapture with which his successors speak of his "gold dew-drops of speech." Johnson misses the point entirely when he finds fault with Dryden for ascribing to Chaucer

the first refinement of our numbers, and says that Gower also can show smooth numbers and easy rhymes. The refinement of our numbers means something far more than this. A nation may have versifiers with smooth numbers and easy rhymes, and yet may have no real poetry at all. Chaucer is the father of our splendid English poety ; he is our "well of English undefiled," because by the lovely charm of his diction, the lovely charm of his movement, he makes an epoch and founds a tradition. In Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, we can follow the tradition of the liquid diction, the fluid movement, of Chaucer; at one time it is his liquid diction of which in these poets we feel the virtue, and at another time it is fluid movement. And the virtue is irresistible.

Bounded as is my space, I must yet find room for an example of Chaucer's virtue, as I have given examples to show the virtue of the great classics. I feel disposed to say that a single line is enough to show the charm of Chaucer's verse ; that merely one line this—

"O martyr souded in virginitee !"

has a virtue of manner and movement such as we shall not find in all the verse of romance-poetry ;—but this is saying nothing. The virtue is such as we shall not find, perhaps, in all English poetry, outside the poets whom I have named as the special inheritors of Chaucer's tradition. A single line, however, is too little if we have not the strain of Chaucer's verse well in our memory ; let us take a stanza. It is from *The Prioress's Tale*, the story of the Christian child murdered in a Jewry—

"My throte is cut unto my nekke-bone
Saide this child, and as by way of kinde
I should have deyd, yea, longe time agone ;
But Jesus Christ, as ye in bookes finde,
Will that his glory last and be in minde,
And for worship of his mother dere
Yet may I sing *O Alma* loud and clere."

Wordsworth has modernised this Tale, and to feel how delicate and evanescent is the charm of verse, we have only to read Wordsworth's first three lines of this stanza after Chaucer's—

> "My throte is cut unto the bone, I trow,
> Said this young child, and by the law of kind
> I should have died, yea, many hours ago."

The charm is departed. It is often said that the power of liquidness and fluidity in Chaucer's verse was dependant upon a free, a licentious dealing with language, such as is now impossible : upon a liberty, such as Burns too enjoyed, of making words like *neck*, *bird*, into a dissyllable by adding to them, and words like *cause*, *rhyme*, into a dissyllable by sounding the *e* mute. It is true that Chaucer's fluidity is conjoined with this liberty, and is admirably served by it ; but we ought not to say that it was dependant upon it. It was dependant upon his talent. Other poets with a like liberty do not attain to the fluidity of Chaucer ; Burns himself does not attain to it. Poets, again, who have a talent akin to Chaucer's, such as Shakespeare or Keats, have known how to attain to his fluidity without the like liberty.

And yet Chaucer is not one of the great classics. His poetry transcends and effaces, easily and without effort, all the romance-poetry of Catholic Christendom ; it transcends and effaces all the English poetry contemporary with it ; it transcends and effaces all the English poetry subsequent to it down to the age of Elizabeth. Of such avail is poetic truth of substance, in its natural and necessary union with poetic truth of style. And yet, I say, Chaucer is not one of the great classics. He has not their accent. What is wanting to him is suggested by the mere mention of the name of the first great classic of Christendom the immortal poet who died eighty years before Chaucer,—Dante. The accent of such verse as

> "In la sua volontade enostra pace......"

is altogether beyond Chaucer's reach; we praise him, but we feel that this accent is out of the question for him.

It may be said that it was necessarily out of the reach of any poet in the England of that stage of growth. Possibly; but we are to adopt a real, not a historic, estimate of poetry. However, we may account for its absence, something is wanting, then, to the poetry of Chaucer, which poetry must have before it can be placed in the glorious class of the best. And there is no doubt what that something is. It is the high and excellent seriousness, which Aristotle assigns as one of the grand virtues of poetry. The substance of Chaucer's poetry, his view of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness, benignity; but it has not this high seriousness. Homer's criticism of life has it, Dante's has it, Shakespeare's has it. It is this chiefly which gives to our spirits what they can rest upon; and with the increasing demands of our modern ages upon Poetry, this virtue of giving us what we can rest upon will be more and more highly esteemed. A voice from the slums of Paris, fifty or sixty years after Chaucer, the voice of poor Villon out of his life of riot and crime, has at its happy moments (as, for instance; in the last stanza of *La Belle Henulmiere*)*

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*The name *Heaulmiere* is said to be derived from a headdress (helm) worn as a mark by courtesans. In Villon's ballad, a poor old creature of this class laments her days of youth and beauty. The last stanza of the ballad runs thus—

"Ainsi le born temps regretons
Entre nous, pauvres vieilles sottes.
Assises bas, a croppetons,
Tout en ung tas comme pelottes;
A petit feu de chenevottes
Tost allu nees, tost estainctes.
Et jadis fusmes si mignottes!
Ainsi en prend a maintz et maintes."

"Thus amongst ourselves we regret the good time, poor silly old things, low-seated on our heels all in a heap like so many balls; by a little fire of hemp-stalks, soon lighted, soon spent. And once we were such darlings! So fares it with many and many a one."

more of this important poetic virtue of seriousness than all the productions of Chaucer. But its apparition in Villon, and in men like Villon, is fitful; the greatness of the great poets, the power of their criticism of life, is that their virtue is sustained.

To our praise, therefore, of Chaucer as a poet there must be this limitation; he lacks the high seriousness of the great classics, and therewith an important part of their virtue. Still, the main fact for us to bear in mind about Chaucer is his sterling value according to that real estimate which we firmly adopt for all poets. He has poetic truth of substance, though he has no high poetic seriousness, and corresponding to his truth of substance he has an exquisite virtue of style and manner. With him is born our real poetry.

For my present purpose I need not dwell on our Elizabethan poetry, or on the continuation and close of this poetry in Milton. We, all of us, profess to be agreed in the estimate of this poetry; we all of us recognise it as great poetry, our greatest, and Shakespeare and Milton as our poetical classics. The real estimate, here, has universal currency. With the next age of our poetry divergency and difficulty begin. An historic estimate of that poetry has established itself; and the question is whether it will be found to coincide with the real estimate.

The age of Dryden, together with our whole eighteenth century which followed it, sincerely believed itself to have produced poetical classics of its own, and even to have made advance in poetry, beyond all its predecessors. Dryden regards as not seriously disputabe the opinion that "the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by our fathers." Cowley could see nothing at all in Chaucer's poetry. Dryden heartily admired and, as we have seen, praised its matter admirably; but of its exquisite manner and movement all he can find to say is that "there is the rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect." Addison, wishing to

praise Chaucer's numbers, compares them with Dryden's own. And all through the eighteenth century, and down even into our own times, the stereotyped phrase of approbation for good verse found in our early poetry has been, that it even approached the verse of Dryden, Addison, Pope and Johnson.

Are Dryden and Pope poetical classics? Is the historic estimate, which represents them as such, and which has been so long established that it cannot easily give way, the real estimate? Wordsworth and Coleridge, as is well known, denied it; but the authority of Wordsworth and Coleridge does not weigh much with the young generation, and there are many signs to show that the eighteenth century and its judgments are coming into favour again. Are the favourite poets of the eighteenth century classics?

It is impossible within my present limits to discuss the question fully. And what man of letters would not shrink from seeming to dispose dictatorially of the claims of two men who are, at any rate, such masters in letters as Dryden and Pope; two men of such admirable talent, both of them and one of them, Dryden, a man, on all sides, of such energetic and genial power? And yet, if we are to gain the full benefit from poetry, we must have the real estimate of it. I cast about for some mode of arriving, in the present case, at such an estimate without offence. And perhaps the best way is to begin, as it is easy to begin, with cordial praise.

When we find Chapman, the Elizabathan translator of Homer, expressing himself in his Preface thus : "Though truth in her very nakedness sits in so deep pit, that from Gades to Aurora and Ganges few eyes can sound her, I hope yet those few here will so discover and confirm that, the date being out of her darkness in this morning of our poet, he shall now gird his temples with the sun,"—we pronounce that such a prose is intolerable. When we find Milton writing : "And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he, who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poet,"—we pronounce that such a prose has its own grandeur, but that it is obsolete and inconvenient.

But when we find Dryden telling us : "What Virgil wrote in the vigour of his age in plenty and at ease, I have undertaken to translate in my declining years; struggling with wants, oppressed with sickness, curbed in my genius, liable to be misconstrued in all I write,"—then we exclaim that there at last we have the true English prose, a prose such as we would all gladly use if we only knew how. Yet Dryden was Milton's contemporary.

But after the Restoration, the time had come when our nation felt imperious need of a fit prose. So, too, the time had likewise come when our nation felt the imperious need of freeing itself from the absorbing preoccupation which religion in the Puritan age had exercised. It was impossible that this freedom should be brought about without some negative excess, without some neglect and impairment of the religious life of the soul ; and the spiritual history of the eighteenth century shows us that the freedom was not achieved without them. Still, the freedom was achieved, the preoccupation, an undoubtedly baneful and retarding one if it had continued, was got rid of. And as with religion amongst us at that period, so it was also with letters. A fit prose was a necessity ; but it was impossible that a fit prose should establish itself amongst us without some touch of frost to the imaginative life of the soul. The needful qualities for a fit prose are regularity, uniformity, precision, balance. The men of letters, whose destiny it may be to bring their nation to the attainment of a fit prose, must of necessity, whether they work in prose or in verse, give a predominating, and almost exclusive, attention to the qualities of regularity, uniformity, precision. balance. But an almost exclusive attention to those qualities involves repression and silencing of poetry.

We are to regard Dryden as the puissant and glorious founder, Pope as the splendid high priest, of our age of prose and reason, of our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century. For the purposes of their mission and destiny, their poetry like their prose, is admirable.

Do you ask me whether Dryden's verse, take it almost where you will, is not good ?

> "A milk-white Hind, immortal and uncharged,
> Fed on the lawns and in the forest ranged."

I answer : Admirable for the purposes of the inaugurator of an age of prose and reason. Do you ask me whether Pope's verse, take it almost where you will, is not good?

> "To Hounslow Heath I point, and Banstead Down ;
> Thence comes your mutton, and these chicks my own."

I answer: Admirable for the purposes of the high priest of an age of prose and reason. But do you ask me whether such verse proceeds from men with an adquate poetic criticism of life, from men whose criticism of life has a high seriousness, or even without that high seriousness, has poetic largeness, freedom, insight, benignity? Do you ask me whether the application of ideas to life in the verse of these men, often a powerful application, no doubt, is a powerful *poetic* application? Do you ask me whether the poetry of these men has either the matter or the inseparable manner of such an adequate poetic criticism ; whether it has the accent of

> "Absent thee from felicity awhile......"

or of

> "And what is else not to be overcome......"

or of

> "O martyr souded in virginitee!"

I answer: It has not and cannot have them : it is the poetry of the builders of an age of prose and reason. Though they may write in verse, though they may in a certain sense be masters of the art of versification, Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose.

Gray is our poetical classic of that literature and age ; the position of Gray is singular, and demands a word of notice here. He has not the volume or the power of poets who, coming in times more favourable, have attained to an independent criticism of life. But he lived with the great

poets, he lived, above all, with the Greeks, through perpetually studying and enjoying them ; and he caught their poetic point of view for regarding life, caught their poetic manner. The point of view and the manner are not self-sprung in him, he caught them of others ; and he had not the free and abundant use of them. But whereas Addison and Pope never had the use of them, Gray had the use of them at times. He is the scantiest and frailest of classics in our poetry, but he is a classic.

And now, after Gray, we are met, as we drew towards the end of the eighteenth century, we are met by the great name of Burns. We enter now on times where the personal estimate of poets begins to be rife, and where the real estimate of them is not reached without difficulty. But in spite of the disturbing pressures of personal partiality, of national partiality, let us try to reach a real estimate of the poetry of Burns.

By his English poetry, Burns in general, belongs to the eighteenth century, and has little importance for us.

> "Mark ruffian Violence, distain'd with crimes,
> Rousing elate in these degenerate times ;
> View unsuspecting Innocence a prey,
> As guileful Fraud points out the erring way ;
> While stuble Litigation's pliant tongue
> The life-blood equal sucks of Right and Wrong !"

Evidently this is not the real Burns, or his name and fame would have disappeared long ago. Nor is Clarinda's love-poet, Sylvander, the real Burns either. But he tells us himself : "These English songs gravel me to death. I have not the command of the language that I have of my native tongue. In fact, I think that my ideas are more barren in English than in Scotch. I have been at *Duncan Gray* to dress it in English, but all I can do is desperately stupid." We English turn naturally, in Burns, to the poems in our own language, because we can read them easily; but in those poems we have not the real Burns.

The real Burns is of course in his Scotch poems. Let us boldly say that of much of this poetry, a poetry dealing perpetually with Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners, a Scotchman's estimate is apt to be personal. A Scotchman is used to this world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners ; he has a tenderness for it ; he meets its poet half-way. In this tender mood he reads pieces like the *Holy Fair* or *Halloween.* But this world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scatch manners is against a poet, not for him, when it is not a partial countryman who reads him ; for in itself it is not a beautiful world, and no one can deny that it is of advantage to a poet to deal with a beautiful world. Burns's world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners, is often a harsh, a sordid, a repulsive world ; even the world of his *Cottar's Saturday night* is not a beautiful world. No doubt a poet's criticism of life may have such truth and power that it triumphs over its world and delights us. Burns may triumph over this world, often he does triumph over his world, but let us observe how and where. Burns is the first case we have had where the bias of the personal estimate tends to mislead ; Let us look at him closely—he can bear it.

Many of his admirers will tell us that we have Burns', convivial, genuine, delightful here—

"Leeze me on drink ! it gies us mair
Than either school or college;
It kindles wit, it waukens lair,
It pangs us fou o' knowledge.
Be't whisky gill or penny wheep
Or any stronger potion,
It never fails, on drinking deep,
To kittle up our notion
By night or day."

There is a great deal of that sort of thing in Burns, and it is unsatisfactory, not because it is bacchanalian poetry, but because it has not that accent of sincerity which bacchanalian poetry, to do it justice, very often has. There is something in it of bravado, something which makes us feel that we have not the man speaking to us with his real voice ; something, therefore, poetically unsound.

With still more confidence, will his admirers tell us that we have the genuine Burns, the great poet, when his strain asserts the independence, equality, dignity, of men, as in the famous song *Foe 'a that and a' that*—

A prince can mak' a belted knight,
  A marquis, duke, and a' that ;
But an honest man's aboon his might,
  Guid faith he mauna fa' that !
For a' that, and a, that,
  Their dignities, and a' that;
The pith o' sense, and pride o' worth,
  Are higher rank than a' that.

Here they find his grand, genuine touches; and still more, when this puissant genius, who so often set morality at defiance, falls moralising.—

The sacred lowe o' weel-placed love
  Luxuriantly indulge it ;
But never tempt th' illicit rove,
  Tho' naething should divulge it:
I waive the quantum o' the sin,
  The hazard o' concealing,
But ooh ! it hardens a' within,
  And petrifies the feeling.

Or in a higher strain—

Who made the heart, 'tis He alone
  Decidedly can try us ;
He knows each chord, its various tone :
  Each spring, its various bias.
Then at the balance let's bemute,
  We never can adjust it ;
What's *done* we partly may compute,
  But know not what's resisted."

Or in a better strain yet, a strain, his admirers will say, unsurpassable—

To make a happy fire-side clime
        To weans and wife,
That's the true pathos and sublime
        Of human life.

There is criticism of life for you, the admirers of Burns will say to us : there is the application of ideas to life ! There is, undoubtedly. The doctrine of the last-quoted lines coincides almost exactly with what was the aim and end, Xenophon tells us, of all the teaching of Socrates. And the application is a powerful one, made by a man of vigorous understanding, and (need I say?) a master of language.

But for supreme poetical success more is required than the powerful application of ideas to life ; it must be an application under the conditions fixed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. Those laws fix as an essential condition, in the poet's treatment of such matters as are here in question, high seriousness ;—the high seriousness which comes from absolute sincerity. The accent of high seriousness born of absolute sincerity, is what gives to such verse as:

"In la sua volontade e nostra pace......"

to such criticism of life as Dante's in its power. Is this accent felt in the passage which I have been quoting from Burns? Surely not ; surely, if our sense is quick, we must perceive that we have not in those passages a voice from the very inmost soul of the genuine Burns ; he is not speaking to us from these depths, he is more or less preaching. And the compensation for admiring such passages less, from missing the perfect poetic accent in them, will be that we shall admire more the poetry where that accent is found.

No ; Burns, like Chaucer, comes short of the high seriousness of the great classics, and the virtue of matter and manner which goes with that high seriousness is wanting in his work. At moments he touches it in a profound and passionate melancholy, as in those four immortal lines taken by Byron as a motto for *The Bride of Abydos*, but which have in them a depth of poetic quality such as resides in no verse of Byron's own—

"Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met, or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

But a whole poem of that quality Burns cannot make ; the rest, in the *Farewell to Nancy*, is verbiage.

We arrive best at the real estimate of Burns, I like, by conceiving his work as having truth of matter and truth of manner, but not the accent or the poetic virtue of the highest masters. His genuine criticism of life, when the sheer poet in him speaks, is ironic : it is not—

> "Thou Power Supreme, whose mighty scheme
> These woes of mine fulfil,
> Here firm I rest, they must be best
> Because they are Thy will!"

It is far rather : *Whistle owre the lave o't*. Yet we may say of him as of Chaucer, that of life and the world, as they come before him, his view large, free, shrewd, benignant, —truly poetic, therefor ; and his manner of rendering what he sees is to match. But we must note, at the same time, his great difference from Chaucer. The freedom of Chaucer is heightened, in Burns, by a fiery, reckless energy; the benignity of Chaucer deepens, in Burns, into an overwhleming sense of the pathos, of things;—of the pathos of human nature, the pathos, also, of nonhuman nature. Instead of the fluidity of Chaucer's manner, the manner of Burns has spring, bounding * swiftness. Burns is by far the greater force, though he has perhaps less charm. The world of Chaucer is fairer, richer, more significant than that of Burns ; but when the largeness and freedom of Burns get full sweep, as in *Tom o' Shanter*, or still more in that puissant and splendid production, *The Jolly Beggars*, his world may be what it will, his poetic genius triumphs over it. In the world of *The Jolly Beggars* there is more than hideousness and squalor, there is bestiality ; yet the piece is a superb poetic success. It has a breadth, truth, and power which make the famous scene in Auerbach's Cellar, of Goethe's *Faust*, seem artificial and tame beside it, and which are only matched by Shakespeare and Aristophones.

Here, where his largeness and freedom serve him so admirably, and also in those poems and songs where to shrewdness he adds infinite archness and wit, and to benignity infinite pathos, where his manner is flawless, and a

perfect poetic whole is the result,—in things like the address to the mouse whose home he had ruined, in things like *Duncan Gray*, *Tam Glen*, *Whitsle* and *I'll come to you, my Lord, Auld Lang Syne* (this list might be made much longer) —here we have the genuine Burns, of whom the real estimate must be high indeed. Not a classic, nor with the excellent of the great classics, nor with a verse rising to a criticism of life and a virtue like theirs; but a poet with thorough truth of substance and an answering truth of style, giving us a poetry sound to the core. We all of us have a leaning towards the pathetic, and may be inclined perhaps to prize Burns most for his touches of piercing, sometimes almost intolerable, pathos ; for verse like—

"We twa hae paidl't i' the burn
  From mornin' sun till dine ;
But seas between us braid hae roar'd
  Sin auld lang syne......"

where he is as lovely as he is sound. But perhaps it is by the perfection of soundness of his lighter and archer master-pieces that he is poetically most wholesome for us. For the votary misled by a personal estimate of Shelley, as so many of us have been, are, and will be,—of that beautiful spirit building his many-coloured haze of words and images:

"Pinnacled dim in the intense inane"—

no contact can be wholesomer than the contact with Burns at his archest and soundest. Side by side with the

On the brink of the night and the morning
  My coursers are wont to respire,
But the Earth has just whispered a warning
  That their flight must be swifter than fire..."

of *Prometheus Unbound*, how salutary, how very salutary, to place this from *Tam Glen*—

"My minnie does constantly deave me
  And bids me beware o' young men ;
They flatter, she says, to deceive me ;
  But wha can think sae o' Tam Glen ?"

But we enter on burning ground as we approach the poetry of times so near to us—poetry like that of Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth—of which the estimates are so often not only personal, but personal with passion. For my purpose, it is enough to have taken the single case of Burns, the first poet we come to of whose work the estimate formed is evidently apt to be personal, and to have suggested how we may proceed, using the poetry of the great classics as a sort of touchstone, to correct this estimate, as we had previously corrected by the same means the historic estimate where we met with it. A collection like the present, with its succession of celebrated names and celebrated poems, offers a good opportunity to us for resolutely endeavouring to make our estimates of poetry real. I have sought to point out a method which will help us in making them so, and to exhibit it in use so far as to put any one who likes in a way of applying it for himself.

At any rate the end to which the method and the estimate are designed to lead, and from leading to which, if they do lead to it, they get their whole value,—the benefit of being able clearly to feel and deeply to enjoy the best the truly classic, in poetry,—is an end, let me say it once more at parting, of supreme importance. We are often told that an era is opening in which we are to see multitudes of a common sort of readers, and masses of a common sort of literature ; that such readers do not want and could not relish anything better than such literature, and that to provide it is becoming a vast and profitable industry. Even if good literature entirely lost currency with the world, it would still be abundantly worth while to continue to enjoy it by oneself. But it never will lose currency with the world in spite of momentary appearances ; it never will lose supremacy. Currency and supremacy are insured to it, not indeed by the world's deliberate and conscious choice, but by something far deeper,—by the instinct of self-preservation in humanity.

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THE STUDY OF POETRY

(Critical Analysis and Exposition)

Use and Function of Poetry :

Poetry has a great future. Mankind will find more and more sustenance in poetry. The idea is all that matters in poetry, and the idea has a life eternal. The *fact* is unstable; for example, the fact—the crucifixion of Christ—upon which Christianity is based, is now failing it, being challenged by the critical spirit of the age.

We should think of poetry as having a higher use than occasional diversion. Its function is to interpret life for us. Science is incomplete without poetry. Wordsworth rightly calls poetry "the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science—the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge". Science is a matter of the intellect, and, therefore, appeals to the limited man. Poetry is a matter of emotions and imagination, and, therefore, appeals to the whole man.

Compare Wordsworth's poem, *Up ! Up ! My Friend* :

> Our meddling intellect
> Misshapes the beauteous forms of things;
> We murder to dissect.

Elsewhere Wordsworth speaks of a scientist as :

> A fingering slave,
> One that would peep and botanise
> Upon his mother's grave.

Poetry can humanize science; so poetry is the breath and finer spirit of knowledge.

Definition of Poetry :

Poetry is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and beauty.

We have to consider several elements in this definition. The term—criticism of life—is a little misleading. Does not Arnold seem to emphasize the substance or matter of poetry above the form or matter ? But form and matter are one in poetry.

Worsfold on "Criticism of Life"—"The poet or novelist by creating ideal pictures of life, provides an ideal standard with which the facts of real life can be contrasted." Arnold means by it application of ideas to life. There is some vagueness about this too. It is with experience of life that a poet or any artist has to deal, and this experience is transformed by the imagination. These ideas have some bearing upon life. But are they necessarily to be acted upon in life? They may react upon life, but the ideas put into poetry, or with which poetry deals, do not necessarily shape our life. Perhaps it will be little better to say that poetry interprets—and so does fiction too.

We have next to consider what poetic truth is and what poetic beauty is. Poetic truth evidently refers to the matter or substance of poetry *i.e.*, the experience of life as apprehended by the poet and as expressed poetically. Poetic beauty evidently refers to the form or manner of poetry. We have said above that form and matter are all one in poetry. So the truth of life, put into poetry, can be poetic truth when it is rendered by the imagination and becomes a thing of beauty which is a joy for ever. We may quote here Keats :

> Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Finally truth and beauty are identical.

There is further aspect of poetic truth. In poetry the truth is the mental reflection of the external reality. The poet reproduces in his representation of the real, not crude realities but the mental aspects of the realities. As Lamborn puts it, "Art has nothing to do with absolute truth ; it shows truth coloured by the artist's mood, seen through the medium of the artist's mind."

Three Estimates of Poetry

The historic estimate regards a poet in relation to his age, or as concerned with a particular phase of development. The personal estimate has to do with the personal likes and dislikes of a criric in judging a poet. The real estimate looks for real excellences in poetry ; and is concerned with the sense for the best. It is satisfied with nothing short of perfection.

The historic estimate is likely to be applied in dealing with the poets of the past; the personal estimate, in dealing with poets, contemporary, or modern.

Comparing the Old English poet Caedmon with Milton, is an instance of the historic estimate. And we may say that Arnold's disparagement of Shelley is an instance of the personal estimate.

Arnold discourages either the historic or the literary estimate. The historic estimate may be necessary in studying a poet of the past and the influence he exercised upon his contemporaries or in reference to the future development of poetry. For example, in tracing the history of romantic poetry we examine some poets of the late eighteenth century—Thompson, Collins, Gray. A poet is not to be judged independently of his age. Arnold himself explains the sterility of Gray with reference to the age in which he was born ; this is a historic estimate. He could have noted too that Gray anticipated the romantic movement in poetry.

Pope was not a great poet, but he was a great poet in his age, and that because he perfected the heroic couplet as a medium of verse. He was decried in the age of Wordsworth because the standard of judgment varies from age to age. Arnold's real estimate comes to something like an absolute standard of judgment. Nor can we totally ignore the personal estimate.

After all, a poet is what he means to an individual reader or critic. The personal reaction of a reader or critic—and that of course depends partly on the individual temperament—is set forth in literary criticism. The personal estimate is in fact the main factor, determining the general

trend of any critic's judgment. There has been no exception in the case of Arnold. Arnold has a classically trained mind and a cool temperament, and is naturally biased toward Greek sanity and temperance, which determine his literary judgments. He may sincerely endeavour to discover the real excellences of a poet, but in doing so he follows his own bias—his classical turn of mind. No absolute standard can be set up for literary judgment.

Arnold writes with a very practical end in view. And he tells us how to apply the real estimate. He suggests that we must treasure up in our memory lines and expressions of the great masters—and he gives us examples from poets English and classical. These lines and passages are to be applied as a test. These lines sound all right—they have the quality of strangeness added to beauty, noted for the startling novelty or familiarity of ideas as well as the felicity of expression. These lines are picked out of the mass of a poet's work. Does a poet maintain the same level in all that he writes ? Even Shakespeare has his lapses; his level of excellence is not uniformly maintained in the work of any poet. And we are asked by Arnold to judge the work of other poets by the best lines of the best poets. Arnold, however, sums up thus : "The higher qualities of poetry reside in the matter and substance as well as in the manner and style ; the substance of poetry must possess truth and seriousness, and upon truth and seriousness depends the excellence of the style and diction."

Chaucer and his Influence

Chaucer was nourished on early French poetry, and borrowed his rhyme and meter from it, *e.g.* the heroic couplet ; the ottava rima (*a b a b a b c c*), though of Italian origin, came to Chaucer through French poetry. Chaucer's poetry has more life in it than the French romance poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Chaucer's superiority lies in :

(1) His large , tolerant and gracious view of life. (Chaucer deals with life, and the French romance-poets deal with shadowy abstractions.)

(2) His verse-melody ("divine liquidness of diction, divine fluidity of movement")—easy flow and smoothness of versification.

(3) His tradition of melodious verse continued in Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats.

Yet Chaucer is not a great classic. He lacks high seriousness, as compared with Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare.

Age of Dryden and Pope

It is an age of prose and reason. Dryden and Pope are not poetical classics. They and their age thought a lot about their poetical production. Wordsworth and Coleridge who began a reform of English poetry, first challenged their claims. In the eighteenth century real poetry declined and as a matter of fact sensible prose—prose for everyday use—came into existence. There was a demand for such a prose. We may note the following factors.

(1) Change from a poetical to a critical temper ; (2) spread of the spirit of common-sense ; (3) growth of science requiring precision and lucidity ; (4) political purposes to which prose was applied in an age of political controversy ; (5) rise of a varied and miscellaneous public ; (6) despecialization and generalization of knowledge ; (7) pamphlets and journals ; and (8) influence of France holding the model of prose required.

The development of a fit prose was attended by "some touch of foreign to the imaginative life of the soul." The qualities for such a prose are regularity, uniformity, precision, balance. Exclusive attention to these qualities is fatal to poetry. The poetry of Dryden and Pope, judged by the standard of prose, is admirable. But in it we look in vain for an adequate poetic criticism of life, or high seriousness, even anything of Chaucer's tolerance, insight and graciousness.

Gray : Arnold regards Gray as a poetical classic in the eighteenth-century literature. He studied and assimilated the spirit of the Greeks and caught their poetic manner.

He cannot be said to be an original poet. He is rather full of echoes. Arnold thinks that if he had not been born in that unpoetical age, he could have attained to an independent criticism of life. The age evidently repressed his "noble rage" and froze "the general current" of his soul. Hence the scantiness of his production. Yet Arnold stoutly maintains that Gray is classic. It is an instance of Arnold's personal estimate. Gray is important because he is one of the pioneers of the Romantic Movement in English poetry—but he has hardly been able to outgrow the manner of the eighteenth-century poetry.

Burns : Arnold attempts a real estimate of Burns. The countrymen of Burns are apt to fall into a personal estimate of the poet. Burns is not to be judged by his English verses, in which he is not quite at home, and which hardly differ from the eighteenth-century poetry with its insipid poetical epithets, its frigid emotions and conventional style. The real Burns is in his Scotch poems. Arnold blames him for living in a world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, Scotch manner. Evidently, Arnold is unable to appreciate the realistic note in Burns, but he admires his truth and passionate sincerity.

The best of Burns is not in his wild drink songs, nor in his declamatory verses, expressive of the new democratic sentiment nor in his didactic songs, though there are admirers of variety. Here Arnold shows the danger of the personal estimate in the case of Burns. There is a powerful application of ideas of life—the note of passionate sincerity—in Burns' poetry, but Burns has, as Arnold maintains, often been indifferent to the laws of poetic truth. Burns lacks high seriousness, which is born of absolute sincerity. High seriousness, as Arnold seems to think, is a voice from the inmost soul of the poet. It is allied to absolute sincerity, which can reveal the inmost soul of the poet, as in a flash. The lines from Burns, that are quoted by Arnold—lines said to be marked by high seriousness—are noted for concentration of thought and expression—packing of sense, profoundly passionate, soul-stirring, into a minimum of words.

Arnold, however, finds the note of high seriousness in the lines :

> Had we never loved sae kindly,
> Had we never loved sae blindly,
> Never met, or never parted,
> We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

But it is not continuous or sustained. On the whole, Burns has the truth of matter and the truth of manner, but not the accent of the master. He has an ironical sense of life and things, often crossed and lightened by tenderest pathos—often approaching Virgil's *lacrymae rerum* (sense of tears in things mortal).

Arnold compares Burns with Chaucer. Like Chaucer's, his view is large, free, shrewd, benignant—truly poetic ; but Chaucer's freedom is replaced by a fiery energy in Burns, and Chaucer's benignant grace, by a deep sense of pathos, and Chaucer's fluent melody, by more impassioned rhythm and quicker movement. Chaucer portrays a fairer and more gracious world, but Burns can but seldom escape from the world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion and Scotch manner—though, as Arnold confesses, he can reveal truth and beauty in such a world. But the comparison seems to be rather unfair, for Chaucer is pre-eminently a narrative poet, and Burns, pre-eminently a lyric poet.

NOTES

Paragraph. 1. **The future of poetry......stay**—*i.e.*, mankind will turn more and more to poetry in the future for consolation and sustenance of the spirit rather than depend on religion, for creeds and dogmas are constantly changing ; it is good poetry that will minister to our mind and spirit. **There is not a creed......dissolve**—the old faith and tradition are being disrupted by the advance of science. The Bible was subjected to criticism in those days, belief in the Trinity began to be discarded, and the miracles, attributed to Christ, began to be questioned. **Our religion ....fact**—*i.e.*, Christianity is based upon such facts as the crucifixion, the miracles and formulated creeds and dogmas—and those are being questioned now in the age of

science and advance in knowledge. **But for poetry......... illusion**—Poetry does not depend on fact, but on idea. Facts may change, and be replaced by new things, discovered in human experience. Poetry deals with ideas—ideas about all that is primary and elemental in human experience —with "truths that wake to perish never." The 'world of illusion' is the world created by the poet's imagination. Compare :

> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
> And, as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name. —*Shakespeare.*

The strongest.........poetry—it is the poetical elements in the religion that have the strongest appeal to the human mind and imagination.

Paragraph 2. **One great contributory stream**—English Poetry. **We should conceive.........hitherto**—we read poetry for momentary diversion, and do not feel that it can have an important bearing upon our life. **More and more mankind............sustain us**—it is Arnold's personal view, poetry interests but few people. It serves the purpose of occasional diversion. It is Arnold's illusion that people will take more and more to poetry, and rely less on philosophy and religion. **Our science............incomplete**—*i.e.*, poetry can humanize science. **The impassioned...science**—science is soulless unless it is allied to poetry. **The breath ....knowledge**—the quintessence of knowledge. **Our religion............knowledge**—Christianity basing itself on such facts as the crucifixion and the world's acceptance of the teaching of Christ and philosophy, dealing with the finite and the infinite, with cause and effect, give us the shadows, not the realities of knowledge.

Paragraph 3. **Sainte-Beuve**—(1808-1860), French critic. **Charlatan**—one who boasts of his pretended powers. **In Poetry.........one**—thought and the art of expression blend

together in poetry, and one cannot be separated from the other. The inevitable union of thought and expression is the test of good poetry. **Charlatanism is for......half-true**—charlatanism may be taken as *bravura i.e.*, brilliant or dashing display in performance, and it does not make excellent poetry. **A criticism of life......poetic beauty**—the function of poetry, as Arnold thinks, is the criticism of life. What can that mean? Is it to make the best that has been thought and known prevail? It seems to be so. After all, poerty is to deal with human experience which is the *matter* for poetry, and to put it into arresting words and phrases, which is the *manner* for poetry. Arnold states that the criticism of life is the application of ideas to life, which does not carry it much further, however. It has been explained also to be the result of the poet's generalization upon life; the beautiful things he says about life and the beautiful pictures he draws about life as he passes through life are the criticism of life; the value of poetry lies in the beauty and truth of this generalization; and it is saying no more than

Beauty is truth, truth beauty.

Paragraph 4. **A poetical collection...........present**—*The English Poets*, edited by T. H. Ward. **We should therefore steadily set......proceed**—a high standard of excellence should be kept before the mind by the reader, and never for a moment lost sight of, if he is to get the real benefit—the substance of his spirit and all that from poetry. The reader of poetry should be, in a sense, a critic, and find out what best poetry there is for him to read. Arnold is going to talk of the real estimate.

Paragraph 5. **This real estimate**—a sense for the best, the really excellent in poetry and the sense of strength and joy to be drawn from poetry. **The course of development... overrate it**—the historic estimate becomes necessary to determine the place of a poet in relation to other poets, contemporary, past, and also future. A student of literature cannot ignore the historical estimate. For example, to find out what part Wordsworth played in the Romantic Movement, we have recourse to the historic estimate,

But the estimate is not enough by itself. Nor can Arnold's real estimate be enough if it ignores the historic estimate or the personal estimate. **Our personal affinities......high importance**—the personal element cannot be totally excluded. The final judgments of a critic depend on his personal relation. He reads a poem, and it produces some effect upon him; different individuals may be differently affected by the same poem, though they may find something in common and something on which they all agree. Poetry appeals to the common humanity in us and this is how we discover the excellence of poetry. But after all, it is a personal estimate for every individual reader of poetry. A French critic says, "The whole effort of a sincere man is to erect his personal impressions into laws." This is at any rate the function of a critic. And Arnold has been doing the same.

Paragraph 6. **It is evident how naturally......poetry**—Here Arnold recognizes the value of the historic estimate in the study of poetry. We find Shakespeare the greatest poet and dramatist by comparing him with poets and dramatists who lived in the past and also by comparing him with poets and dramatists who had come after him—and this is a historic estimate. **Their own early poetry**—*i.e.*, Renaissance medieval poetry. **The Court-tragedy of the seventeenth century**—the works of Corneille and Racine who aodpted the formal rules of Aristotle's *Poetics*; the spirit of the ancients evaporated; only the skeleton remained. **Pellisson**—(1624-1693), a member of the French Academy. **Politesse sterile et rampante**—barren and extravagant refinement. **Clement Marot**—(1496-1544), a French poet. **The cloud of glory......history**—*i.e.*, a blind admiration for the classical writing—the art and literature of the Greeks—may arrest the natural development of the literature of a country, and prevents the historical perspective. **One single point**—the greatest writer of an epoch. **It substitutes... physiognomy**—we miss the living person (the great artist who should be so near to all his fellow creatures), and see instead a luminous light. **It does not......model**—so Arnold is imposing upon us a model—the Greek model of thought and culture—and he seems to be carried away by his admi-

ration for all that is Greek. **Above all, for the historian... unacceptable**—what Arnold quotes here is a vigorous defence of the historic estimate and goes against his imposition of the Greek model.

Paragraph 7. **Classic character**—the Greek virtue of sanity and temperance, which Arnold so highly recommends, or as he explains below, *classic* means the very best, the most excellent. **To trace the labour...its end**—as Arnold points out here, a research student may pursue the historic estimate, going into all the details about the poet and the circumstances of his life, and the relation in which he stood to his contemporaries. But Arnold doubts whether it makes for the real enjoyment and appreciation of good poetry. **Literary dilettanism**—mere dabbling in letters, **Methuselah**—the oldest man, mentioned in the Bible, he died at the age of 969. **Had all of us......steadfastness**—*i.e.*, if our understanding and will were not affected by old age.

Paragraph 8. **A compilation like the present**—T. H. Ward's *The English Poets.* **Imitation**—*The Imitation of Christ*, a famous devotional work, written originally in Latin (1417-1421), and attributed to Thomas Kempis. **Cum multa legris.........principium**—however much you have learnt and known, you are bound to return always to the principle.

Paragraph 9. **Of very much gravity**—of a very serious consequence. **impose even.........them**—deceive or mislead the men of letters who pursue the historic estimate. **Caedmon**—the cowherd of Whitby, the greatest poet of the Anglo-Saxons. He lived in the latter half of the 7th century, and, according to Bede, he was an ignorant man and knew nothing of poetry until one night, when sleeping in the byre, he was miraculously commanded by an angel to sing the Creation and the beginning of created things. In his metrical paraphrase of *Genesis* we find the germ of Milton's *Paradise Lost.* **Joculator or jongleur**—an itinerant minstrel. **Chanson de Roland**——The *Song of Roland*, attributed to the Norman Trouvere Theroulde of Turoldus, tells the story of the death of Roland and all

the paladins at Roncesyalles and of Charlemagne's vengeance. **Tailefer**—the Norman minstrel who sang to encourage William's soldiers at the battle of Hastings (1066). Compare:

> Taillefer, the minstrel-knight, bestrode
> A gallent steed, and swiftly rode
> Before the Duke, and sang the song
> Of Charlemagne, of Roland strong,
> Of Oliver, and those beside
> Brave Knights at Roncevaun that died.

Monument of epic genieus—a first-rate epic poem. **Artificial......ages**—the material for an epic was supplied by primitive ages when the tribal stages had been replaced by a more or less settled life, in which condition Homer's *Iliad* was written. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a literary or artificial epic. **We are here............poetry altogether**—Arnold quotes a passage from *Chanson de Roland* and another from the *Iliad.* We do not see much of a difference in quality between the two passages. The pathos poignant in each case and the simplicity in which it is expressed, are equally effective.

Paragraph 10. **An infallible touchstone.........beside them**—memorable lines and passages of the best poetry will serve as a test for detecting excellences in other poetry that we read. This is, according to Arnold, how to apply the real estimate.

Paragraph 11. **If we are thoroughly penetrated.......... wanting there**—some people are insensible to poetry, and it will be no use if they are confronted with the specimens, given here by Arnold. Those who have a capacity for enjoying and appreciating poetry, will certainly feel the beauty of these specimens—beauty of sentiment and beauty of expression. If critics draw out in the abstract all that constitutes excellences of poetry, what is the harm ? A reader, following the critic, may discover too good a poetry, and he will have to go to concrete examples or specimens for the purpose. **They are in the......style**—The excellence of poetry lies in the excellence of thought and in the beauty of expression. It is a combination of poetic

truth and poetic beauty. **No, for we should.........it**—good poetry is a matter of feeling ; it cannot be defined in words.

Paragraph 12. **A higher truth and a higher seriousness.** —The higher truth may mean here a synthesis of human experience which the poet seeks to express in words : the higher seriousness comes from him thorough apprehension of the truth of life which he conveys to the reader. The Greek words quoted are 'more philosophical and of grave import.' We may quote Aristotle here, and then the idea will be clearer : "The work of Herodotus might be put into verse and it would still be a species of history, with metre no less than without it. The true difference is that one relates, what has happened, the other what may happen. *Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and higher thing than history; for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.* By the universal, I mean how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act according to the law of probability or necessity ; and it is this universality at which poetry aims in the names she attaches to the personages. The particular is—for example—what Alcibiades did or suffered." **The superior character.........style and manner**—The close union of thought and expression is emphasized again and again. Truth and seriousness go into the matter of poetry ; in proportion to the truth and seriousness are the excellence and beauty of style.

Paragraph 14. **Language d' oil and language d'oc**—*Language d'oil*, also called Old French, was French dialect of the Middle Ages, spoken in the provinces of France, north of the Loir River, and from which modern French is derived : literally "language of oil, so called because in those provinces the word for "yes" was *oil*: *Language d' oc* —a French dialect of the Middle Ages, spoken in the southern provinces of France : literally "language of oc", so called because in these provinces the word for 'yes' was oc. The poets of northern France were trouveres—narrative and romance poets. The poets of southern France were troubadours—lyric poets. **Is of importance............ literature**—Troubadour poetry or the lyric poetry of

southern France had a great influence upon Dante and Petrarch. But the poetry of northern France—narrative and epic poetry—had a great influence in the rest of Europe, including England. **Brunetto Latini**—(1210—1294), Italian scholar and orator. **La parleure.........gens**—that tongue is more delightful and common to all men. **Christian of Troyes**—a French poet about whose life little more is known than that he lived. about 1175. He worked up the Arthurian legends into numerous spirited and refined poems, which had a wide literary influence.

Paragraph 16. **An Englishman............poetry**—*i.e.,* (1340-1400), who assimilated the romance poetry of northern France. **That stanza which the Italians used**—*i.e.,* Ottava rima—a stanza composed of 8 lines, each line has 11 syllables in Italian or 10 syllables in English, the first 6 lines rhyming alternately, and the last two with each other—*ab ab ab cc.* **Wolfram of Eschenbach**—a German poet (who died about 1215). He lived for some time in the Wartburg near Eisenach. His epic, *Parcival*, is one of the most notable poems of the Middle Ages. **Chaucer's power............real**—the romance (or Trouverse) poetry of northern France is important historically. Chaucer owed much to this poetry but his poetry is great in itself. The real estimate establishes the greatness of his poetry. Arnold says that Chaucer fascinates, which means that his melody of verse, added to substance of poetry, attracts the reader. **He is a genuine source......always**—Arnold tells us above that we shall turn more and more to poetry for joy and strength. Chaucer's poetry can give us joy and strength. **His language.........for us**—Chaucer wrote in the East-Midland dialect, which later became the standard language of England. It was still in the formative stage with many inflexional forms that later dropped off and with a large infusion of French words. So Chaucer's language is rather unfamiliar to a reader of to-day.

Paragraph 17. **His superiority.........all intelligence command of it**—Chaucer's poetry is superior to the romance poetry of France. This superiority resides in the substance and style of his poetry. Chaucer has a broader and more

generous outlook on life—and deals with living men and women, but the romance poets of France deal with abstractions and show but limited aquaintance with life. **He has gained.........view**—the human note and realism of Chaucer contrast with the vague abstraction and sentiment and the shadowy heroic figures which are presented by the trouveres or romance poets of France. **Here is God's plenty**—refers to the variety, and multiplicity of characters introduced in the *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, as we find in God's creation. The whole of medieval society in presented in the *Prologue*. **He is.........fountain of good sense**—refers to Chaucer's humour and balanced temperament. **It is by a large, free......truth of substance**—Chaucer deals in a large-hearted manner with things and life. His humour, his detachment, his sense of humanity all enter into his representation of life. So his poetry has the truth of substance. Here we meet no airy abstractions of the romance poets of France. Chaucer comes into close grips with life.

Paragraph 18. **Divine liquidness.........movement**—it means the smoothness of his versification, the melody of sound, the natural ease and spontaneity. **'Gold dew-drops of speech**—quoted from Lydgate :

> The noble rhetio poet of Britain,
> That worthy was the laurel to have
> Of poetry, and the palm attain ;
> That made first to distil and rain
> The gold dew-drops of speech and eloquence
> Into our tongue through his excellence,
> And found the flowers first of rhetoric
> Our rude speech only to enlumine.

Numbers—verses. **Gower**—(1325—1408), English poet. He was a friend of Chaucer, who gives him the title of "the moral Gower", which has clung to him ever since. **'Well of English undefiled'**—from Spenser,

> Dan Chaucer, well of English undefyled,
> On Fames eternal bead-roll worthie to be fyled.

Liquid diction—sweet, melodious verse. **Fluid movement**—easy and spontaneous flow.

Paragraph 19. **By way of kinde**—by the law of nature. **O Alma**—the first words of hymn, addressed to the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ. **It is true......served by it**—Chaucer had greater resources in the language he used than a modern English poet, and the exquisite melody of his verse might be partly due to his use of these resources, for example, the sounding of the final *e* and the lengthening out of a syllable or so.

Paragraph 20. **His poetry...........age of Elizabeth**—Chaucer is easily superior to the romance poets of France and to his contemporaries, and he is not matched until we reach the Elizabethan age. **In la sua......pace**—in His will is our peace. There is not much in the thought of this line : the majestic sound of the line that seems to attract Arnold. This cannot be the reason of Dante's superiority to Chaucer. Dante is a poet of a much greater range and scope, gifted with a higher imagination—"the vision and the faculty divine" and then the instrument he used—the Italian language—was more perfect than the English of Chaucer. His *Divina Comedia* is "an encyclopaedic view of the highest culture and knowledge of the age on philosophy, history, classical literature, physical science, morals, theology, expressed in the sublimest and most exquisite poetry, and with consummate power and beauty of language." **High and excellent seriousness**—this is substituted for the Greek word—*spoudaisotes* ; it corresponds to Dante's *gravitas sententiae.* The word is used in connection with the distinction between poetry and history—"Poetry is a more philosophical and a *higher* thing than history." Arnold takes the word to mean *seriousness.* By high seriousness Arnold means the grand style, which, he says, arises in poetry when a noble nature, poetically endowed, treats with simplicity or severity a serious subject. **Gives........rest upon**—*i.e.*, gives proper sustenance to our spirits. **Villon**—Francois Villon (1431—1435), French poet, famous for his ballads, among which may be mentioned *The Ballad of the Hanged* and *The Ballad of Dead Ladies.*

Paragraph 23. **Dryden regards.........our fathers**—Dryden claims that the highest development of English poetry took place in his own day. Verse in heroic couplet popularized by Pope, was much written in that age, and Dryden considers this to be the sweetest verse, ever written. **Cowley**—Abraham Cowley (1618—1657), English poet and prose-writer. His best known poem is *The Davideis*. **"There is the rude sweetness......perfect"**—The artificial elegancies of the eighteenth century poetry pleased Dryden's taste better, and he could not admire the spontaneous melody and sweetness of verse in Chaucer. **Addison**—Joseph Addison (1672—1719), English essayist, famous for his contributions to the *Tatlar* and *Spectator*. **And all through ......Johnson**—The eighteenth century was an age of prose and reason, and its poetry was but prose, direct and unambiguous put into the heroic couplet, and marked by brilliant phrases and conventional epithets. This kind of poetry was very much admired in the eighteenth century and even later until its claim to superiority was demolished by Wordsworth in his criticism. Pope in fact invented an artificial diction for poetry, in which feeling or emotion was held in abeyance ; the poetic diction of Pope was farthest removed from the pure and simple spirit of the great classics.

Paragraph 25. **Two men of such admirable talent........ genial power**—" Dryden does not belong to the highest rank among poets ; he cannot take his rank with Milton, or Spenser, or Dante. But he stands easily first in the second rank. His special power among English poets is that of arguing in verse. He is "unequalled as a reasoner in rhyme." Pope was more 'correct', and polished in couplets with more care ; but he has not the irresistible sweep of Dryden ; he has not his

> "Full, resounding line,
> The long majestic march and energy divine.

Parargraph 26. **Chapman**—George Chapman (1559—1634), English dramatist of the Elizabethan era. He is celebrated as a translator of Homer. **Gades**—Gadiz, city and seaport of Spain. **Aurora**—the dawn-goddess : so it is

the region of the dawn—the East. **From Gades to Aurora**—from extreme West to extreme East. **This Morning of our poet**—The morning of truth has dawned on Homer. **'And long it was not after...poem'**—from: 'Apology'. **Smectymnus in my declining years**—Dryden was 66 when he translated **Virgil.**

Paragraph 27. **Restoration**—the restoration of Charles II in 1660. **But after the Restoration......prose**—Prose was the demand of the age because (1) there was a change from a practical to a critical temper ; (2) spread of the spirit of common-sense ; (3) growth of science requiring precision and lucidity ; (4) practical purposes to which prose came to be more and more applied in an age of increasing political controversy ; (5) rise of a varied and miscellaneous public ; (6) desire of despecialization and generalization of knowledge ; (7) pamphlets and journals ; (8) influence of France holding the model of prose required. **Preoccupation......... exercised**—The Puritan age was the age of Milton. Milton was a poet of militant Puritanism, and religion was one of the issues, with which the people of England were very much concerned in the days of Milton. Milton's purpose in *Paradise Lost* was 'to justify the ways of God to men. **Without some negative excess......of the soul**—*i.e.*, without some damage to the religious spirit. It may be recalled here that the Restoration Court was a centre of licence and immorality. **A fit prose was...soul**—*i.e.*, a fit prose could not emerge without chilling the poetic spirit. In the eighteenth century, as prose developed, poetry declined. **But an almost exclusive attention...........poetry**—There was demand for prose in the eighteenth century. Men of letters cultivated the qualities, needed for prose, and these qualities are definiteness and accuracy of expression, reason, practical commonsense, and these go against poetry.

Paragraph 28. **For the purposes...admirable**—The poetry of Dryden and Pope is essentially the poetry of an age of prose and poetry ; it is poetry that approximates to prose. **But do you ask......benignity**—The poetry of Dryden and Pope has not the note of high seriousness, and lacks in the application of ideas to life ; it is of a narrow and restricted range, touching on the fringe of life and human

affairs and treating of them again superficially. **Poetic application**—poetic application of ideas to life will achieve poetic beauty—it will be sincere, imaginative and impassioned.

Paragraph 29. **He has not............of life**—Gray bad the genuine poetic gift, but he could not fully develop it because he was born in an age of prose. Gray's poetic production was scanty and his criticism of life was inadequate. **But he lived . . . . . manner**—Gray was a classical scholar, and was thoroughly permeated by the spirit and manner of Greek poets. **He had not the free ....them**—*i.e.*, he was hampered by the age in which he was born.

Paragraph 30. **Mark ruffian violence,** *etc.*—from *On the Death of Robert Dundas, Esq., of Arniston.* **Clarinda's love-poet Sylvander**—from *Sylvander to Clarinda.* We may quote the first stanza here as a specimen :

When dear Clarinda, matchless fair,
    First struck Sylvander's raptur'd view,
He gaz'd, he listened to despair,
    Alas ! It was all he dared to do.

It is artificial poetry like the poetry of the age of Dryden and Pope. **Gravel me to death**—make me feel extremely stiff or embarrassed very much. **Duncan Gray**—an old song, on the basis and to the tune of which Burns wrote a ballad (*Duncan Gray*). **I have been . . . .stupid**—he refers to his poem *Inconstancy in Love*, written on the tune of *Duncan Gray*.

Paragraph 31. **Let us boldly. . . . personal**—the best of Burns in his Scotch poems. A Scotchman loves and admires these poems. And Arnold says that there is the instance of a personal estimate. A Scotchman cannot help being personal in his estimate of Burns's poetry. Arnold evidently means that the Scotchman is blind to the faults of Burns's poetry. **Holy Fair or Halloween**—both the poems are rich in local colour and deal with antique customs and rites and also popular superstitions—poems typical of the peasants of Scotland. *Halloween* has been

described as a "masterpiece of humorous folklore." It is a noteworthy and notable poem, but Arnold does not seem to appreciate it. The realism of Burns offends Arnold. About *The Holy Fair* Lockhart writes, "National customs were once more in the hands of a national poet. He mentions *Cotter's Saturday Night* below, which is also a picture of peasant life. Arnold says that it is not even a beautiful world that is presented in the poem. **No doubt a pote's criticism. . . . .lights us**—Burns interprets life, but sometimes it is touched with profound truth and passion, and then it becomes genuine poetry.

Paragraph 32. **Leeze me** *etc.*—quoted from *The Holy Fair*. **Leeze me on brink**— my blessing on drink. **Gies**—gives. **Mair**—more. **Waukens lair**— wakens learning. **Pangs**—crams, **Fou o'**— fall of. **Penny wheep**—small beer. **Kittle**—tickle **Bacchanalian poetry**— drink song, Bacchus is the god of wine. **Bravado**—exaggerated boastfulness.

Paragraph 33. **For a' that and a' that**—a poem of Burns, breathing the democratic sentiment. **Aboon**—above. **Guid**—good. **Maun**—must not. **Fa'**—try. **The pith o' sense** — the inner core of good sense. **They**—*i.e.*, Burns's countrymen. **The sacred lowe**—quoted from *Epistle to a Young Friend*. **Lowe**—flame. **Weelplaced**—legitimate. **Rove**—fleeting—passion. **Quantum**—weight or gravity. **It ardens. . . . feeling**—it atrophies the heart within. **Who made the heart**—from *Poems addressed to the rigidly* righteous, Matthew Arnold admires these lines because they are charged with deep moral. **Balance** *i.e.*, of the judgment. **To make a happy fireside**— from *Epistle to Dr. Black Lock*. **Weans**—children. **Xenophon**—his *Memorabilia* of Socrates, the great philosopher, is a valuable record of the practical philosophy of Socrates.

Paragraph 34. **In la sua . . . .pace**—quoted from Dante. It means—in his will lies our peace.

Paragraph 35. **The Bridge of Abydones**—the heroine is Zuleika, daughter of Giaffer Pasha of Abydos. She is the trothplight bride of Giaffer Pasha of Abydos. She is the trothplight bride of Selim ; but Giaffar shoots the lover,

and Zuleika dies of a broken heart. **Had we never loved**—from *Parting Song to Clarinda.*

Paragraph 36. **Thou power Supreme**—from *Winter, a Dirge*, **Pathos of human nature**—as expressed in Burns's poem, *Auld Lane, Syne.* **Of non-human nature**—as expressed in *Lines addressed to Mouse, To the Daisy.* **Tam o' Shanter**—Tom saw a hellish legion dancing in Allaway Kirk (near Ayr), and being excited cried out, "Weal done, Cutty Sark ;" Immediately the lights were extinguished. And, Tam rode for his life to reach the river Doon. He had himself passed the midstream, but his horse's tail had not reached that magic line, so Cutty Sark caught hold of it and pulled it off.

Think, ye may buy the joys e'r dear—
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.

The world of the Jolly Beggars—it is a scene of drinking and song, in which are introduced a broken soldier and a girl and other anomalous characters of the vagrant type and they make the most of their time by boozing and defying all canons of morality. **Auerbach's Cellar**—a wine cellar in Leipzig in Goethe's *Faust* where a similar scene of a drunken bout takes place. **Goethe's Faust**—the basis of the legend is that, in return for twenty-four years of further life during which he is to have every pleasure and all knowledge at his command, Faust sells his soul to the devil, and the climax is reached when, at the close of the period, the devil claims him for his own. **Aristophanes**—the greatest of the Greek comic dramatists, noted for his satires of contemporary Greek life.

Paragraph 37. **Here, where his largeness.................. result**—Burns's excellences as a poet lie in his free, generous outlook, in his penetrating insight, in his ironic wit and far-reaching pathos, and these qualities are revealed in such poems as *Lyrics Addressed to a Mouse, Duncan Gray. Tom Glen, Whistle and I'll come to you my, lad, Auld Lang Syne.* **Spoudaiotes** —explained as 'high seriousness' by Arnold. **A poet......core**—Arnold denies to Burns the high seriousness of a classic, the profound criticism of life, but recognizes in

him the high qualities of a poet bringing together and balancing truth of matter and truth of style. **We all of us ....Pathos**—pathos, so exquisitely rendered by Burns, and coming so easy to him, attracts many readers. **Twa**—two. **Paild't**—paddled. **Burn**—small river. **Dine**—Dinner time. **Braid**—broad. It goes with *seas*. **Sin**—since. **Auld**—old. **Syne**—since. **But perhaps...............for us**—some of the shorter poems (lyrics) of Burns are perfect in their form and matter, and he is to be valued for these excellent lyrics. **The votary.......................Shelley**—some readers are attracted by the vague, elusive beauty of Shelley's fancies and dissolving music. **Many-coloured.........images**—*i.e.*, the bewildering succession of shimmering images and the melting melody of words. **"Pinnacled...........inane"**—quoted from Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound,' Arnold seems to depreciate Shelley. **No contact.......soundest**—the corrective for the admirers of Shelley's poetry with its melting melody and iridescent imagery is to be acquainted with the lyrics of Burns. **Minnie**—mother. **Deave**—deafen.

Paragraph 38. **Burning ground**—controversial region. **A sort of touchstone**—a measure and standard. **A collection like the present**—*The English Poets*, edited by T. Ward.

Paragraph 39. **An era is opening.........literature**—refers to the Education Act of 1870 which brought literature within the reach of common people. **Currency and............ humanity**—compare : "The instinct for beauty is set in human nature as sure as the instinct of knowledge is set there or the instinct for conduct. If the instinct of beauty is served Greek literature and art as it is served by no other literature and art, we may trust to the instinct of self-preservation in humanity for keeping Greek as part of our culture".—*Discourse on Science and Literature.*

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. 1. "We should conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive of it."—M. Arnold. What does M. Arnold conceive to be the function of poetry ?

Ans. See *Critical Analysis.*

M. Arnold thinks very highly of the future of poetry. Mankind will turn more and more to poetry, for religious dogma and long-continued traditions are being challenged day by day and cannot be expected to yield any more sustenance to the human spirit. For poetry the idea is everything, and the idea generates emotion. It is necessary that our attitude to poetry should change, if it were to serve its real purpose. We do not take poetry as seriously as we should. Many think of poetry as a diversion for the moment. It is poetry that interprets life for us. Wordsworth calls poetry 'the breath and finer spirit of knowledge'. And that is the right approach to poetry. M. Arnold believes that poetry will one day replace what now passes with us for religion. Science too will appear to be incomplete without poetry. Poetry will humanize science. Religion and philosophy, such as they are, yield us no real knowledge and experience of life ; they are false shows of knowledge. Poetry brings us into intimate contact with life ; poetry is the interpretation of life.

If poetry is to serve its purpose, we must keep its standard high. There is poetry that may tickle our fancy, and afford momentary diversion. We cannot think lightly of poetry and its function. Charlatanism can have a place in politics but none in poetry. It is charlatanism that blurs the distinction between excellent and inferior. In poetry the two should be kept strictly apart. It is excellent poetry that can yield us the pleasure and consolation that the human spirit seeks and needs for its sustenance. Poetry is a criticism of life in which poetic truth and poetic beauty are to be combined. In poetry fulfilling such conditions, mankind will find more and more consolation for its spirit. So it is the best poetry that we need for interpreting life to us, and revealing truth and beauty. The strength and joy that the human spirit seeks are to be found in such poetry.

To discover the best poetry, we should look to the primary and universal elements in human nature which poetry appeals to and nourishes. Hence, M. Arnold warns the reader against going by his personal tastes, which he

calls the personal estimate, and the valuation of poetry in reference to its age and its later influence, which he calls historical estimate. The real estimate of poetry will lead us to all that is excellent, valuable and enduring in poetry—a sound criticism of life. M. Arnold offers a practical suggestion for the real estimate. It is to have always in one's mind, lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. By familiarizing ourselves with the best that has been thought and said in the world, we unconsciously evolve a standard of good poetry in our mind—and it becomes a sort of instinct with us. And when we learn to know and value what is good poetry, it will fulfil its function, and bring us into a close relation with life and its purpose and meaning, and reveal to us truth and beauty. And

> Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

It is good and excellent poetry that can be a sound criticism of life, and as such can fulfil its function rightly. And the excellence of poetry lies in its matter and substance as well as in its manner and style.

Q. 2. What are the three estimates, discussed by M. Arnold, and why are personal and historical estimates likely to divert us from excellent poetry?

Ans. See *Critical Analysis.*

Q. 3. Wherein lies the importance of Chaucer as a poet? Why does M. Arnold deny that he is a great classic?

Ans. Chaucer was nourished on the early poetry of France. He got words, rhyme, metre from this poetry. But his poetry is superior to French poetry, because it is so rich in substance and in texture. His large, free, simple, clear yet kindly view of human life marks all the distinction. The romance-poets of France, compared to Chaucer, live in a shadow world. Their poetry has neither substance nor beauty of style. About the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, Dryden remarked, "Here is God's Plenty". The medieval world is pictured here in all its richness and variety—and it comes home to the reader. "He is a perpetual fountain of good sense". It is there

that Chaucer is so immensely superior to the romance-poets of France. His humour, his human-heartedness, his tolerant view of life and its goings-on, his realistic approach distinguish him from his contemporaries in France and England. He is rightly called the Father of English Poetry. Arnold speaks of his divine liquidness of diction, his divine fluidity of movement which is Chaucer's gift to subsequent English poets. His verse-melody is Chaucer's gift to subsequent English poets. His verse-melody is further developed in Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats. His poetry, too, approaches his criticism of it in that it gives a large, free, sound representation of things. We may take a line like this:

O martyr souded in virginitee!

There is nothing like this in the French poetry of the time. Arnold says, "The virtue is such as we shall not find, perhaps, in all English poetry, outside the poets whom I have named as the special inheritors of Chaucer's tradition (*i.e*, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats). It is not true to say that Chaucer owes his melody of verse to his free, licentious use of the language. It is after all a gift of his own. He is a great poet because he combines the melody of verse with the truth or substance of life's experience.

Yet Chaucer is not a great classic. He is not as great a poet as Dante, Shakespeare or Milton. He lacks high seriousness, which Aristotle describes as one of the high attributes of poetry. This high seriousness is possessed by Dante and Shakespeare. Chaucer does not sound such a note as Dante does in the line '*In la sua volontade nostra pace*' (in his will is our peace), or as Shakespeare does in the line '*Absent thee from felicity awhile*. Chaucer does not reach Dante's or Shakespeare's criticism of life. So Arnold says that Chaucer lacks the high seriousness of the great classics. He stands high above the early poets of France and his contemporaries in truth of substance and in an exquisite virtue of style. He is the founder of poetry. But he has not the English accent of the great classics.

WORDSWORTH

I remember hearing Lord Macaulay say, after Wordsworth's death, when subscriptions were being collected to found a memorial of him, that ten years earlier more money could have been raised in Cambridge alone, to do honour to Wordsworth, than was now raised all through the country. Lord Macaulay had, as we know, his own heightened and telling way of putting things, and we must always make allowance for it. But probably it is true that Wordsworth has never, either before or since, been so accepted and popular, so established in possession of the minds of all who profess to care for poetry, as he was between the years 1830 and 1840, and at Cambridge. From the very first, no doubt, he had his believers and witnesses. But I myself heard him declare that, for he knew not how many years, his poetry had never brought him in enough to buy his shoe-strings. The poetry-reading public was very slow to recognise him, and was very easily drawn away from him. Scott effaced him with this public, Byron effaced him.

The death of Byron seemed, however, to make an opening for Wordsworth. Scott, who had for some time ceased to produce poetry himself, and stood before the public as a great novelist ; Scott, too genuine himself not to feel the profound genuineness of Wordsworth, and with an instinctive recognition of his firm hold on nature and of his local truth, always admired him sincerely, and praised him generously. The influence of Coleridge upon young men of ability was then powerful, and was still gathering strength ; this influence told entirely in favour of Wordsworth's poetry. Cambridge was a place where Coleridge's influence had great action, and where

Wordsworth's poetry, therefore, flourished especially. But even amongst the general public its sale grew large, the eminence of its author was widely recognised, and Rydal Mount became an object of pilgrimage. I remember Wordsworth relating how one of the pilgrims, a clergyman, asked him if he had ever written anything besides the *Guide to the Lakes*. Yes, he answered modestly, he had written verses. Not every pilgrim was a reader, but the vogue was established, and the stream of pilgrims came.

Mr. Tennyson's decisive appearance dates from 1842. One cannot say that he effaced Wordsworth as Scott and Byron had effaced him. The poetry of Wordsworth had been so long before the public, the suffrage of good judges was so steady and so strong in its favour, that by 1842 the verdict of posterity, one may almost say, had been already pronounced, and Wordsworth's English fame was secure. But the vogue, the ear and applause of the great body of poetry-readers, never quite thoroughly perhaps his, he gradually lost more and Mr. Tennyson gained them. Mr. Tennyson drew to himself, and away from Wordsworth, the poetry-reading public, and the new generations. Even in 1850, when Wordsworth died, this diminution of popularity was visible, and occasioned the remark of Lord Macaulay which I quote at starting.

The diminution has continued. The influence of Coleridge has waned, and Wordsworth's poetry can no longer draw succour from this ally. The poetry has not, however, wanted eulogists; and it may be said to have brought its eulogists luck, for almost every one who has praised Wordsworth's poetry, has praised it well. But the public has remained cold, or, at least, undetermined. Even the abundance of Mr. Palgrave's fine and skilfully chosen specimens of Wordsworth, in the *Golden Treasury*, surprised many readers, and gave offence to not a few. To tenth-rate critics and compilers, for whom any violent shock to the public taste would be a temerity not to be risked, it is still quite permissible to speak of

Wordsworth's poetry, not only with ignorance but with impertinence. On the Continent he is almost unknown.

I cannot think, then, that Wordsworth has, up to this time, at all obtained his deserts. "Glory," said M. Renan the other day, "glory after all is the thing which has the best chance of not being altogether vanity." Wordsworth was a homely man, and himself would certainly never have thought of talking of glory as that which, after all, has the best chance of not being altogether vanity. Yet we may well allow that few things are less vain than *real* glory. Let us conceive of the whole group of civilised nations as being, for intellectual and spiritual purposes, one great confederation, bound to a joint action and working towards a common result; a confederation whose members have a due knowledge both of the past, out of which they all proceed, and of one another. This was the ideal of Goethe, and it is an ideal which will impose itself upon the thoughts of our modern societies more and more Then to be recognised by the verdict of such a confederation as a master, or even as a seriously and eminently worthy workman, in one's own line of intellectual or spiritual activity, is indeed glory; a glory which it would be difficult to rate too highly. For what could be more beneficent, more salutary? The world is forwarded by having its attention fixed on the best things; and here is a tribunal, free from all suspicion of national and provincial partiality, putting a stamp on the best things, and recommending them for general honour and acceptance. A nation, again, is furthered by recognition of its real gifts and successes; it is encouraged to develop them further. And here is an honest verdict, telling us which of our supposed successes are really, in the judgment of the great impartial world, and not in our own private judgment only, successes, and which are not.

It is so easy to feel pride and satisfaction in one's own things, so hard to make sure that one is right in feeling it! We have a great empire. But so had Nebuchadnezzar. We extol the "unrivalled happiness" of our national civilisation. But then comes a candid friend, and remarks that our upper class is materialised, our middle

class vulgarised, and our lower class brutalised. We are proud of our painting, our music. But we find that in the judgment of other people our painting is questionable, and our music non-existent. We are proud of our men of science. And here it turns out that the world is with us; we find that in the judgment of other people, too, Newton among the dead, and Mr. Darwin among the living, hold as high a place as they hold in our national opinion.

Finally, we are proud of our poets and poetry. Now poetry is nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth. It is no small thing, therefore, to succeed eminently in poetry. And so much is required for duly estimating success here, that about poetry it is perhaps hardest to arrive at a sure general verdict, and takes longest. Meanwhile, our own conviction of the superiority of our national poets is not decisive, is almost certain to be mingled, as we see constantly in English eulogy of Shakespeare, with much of provincial infatuation. And we know what was the opinion current amongst our neighbours the French—people of taste, acuteness, and quick literary tact—not a hundred years ago, about our great poets. The old *Biographie Universelle* notices the pretension of the English to a place for their poets among the chief poets of the world, and says that this is a pretension which to no one but an Englishman can ever seem admissible. And the scornful, disparaging things said by foreigners about Shakespeare and Milton, and about our national overestimate of them, have been often quoted, and will be in every one's remembrance.

A great change has taken place, and Shakespeare is now generally recognised, even in France, as one of the greatest of poets. Yes, some anti-Gallican cynic will say, the French rank him with Corneille and with Victor Hugo! But let me have the pleasure of quoting a sentence about Shakespeare, which I met with by accident not long ago in the *Correspondant*, a French review which not a dozen English people, I suppose, look at. The writer is praising Shakespeare's prose. With Shakespeare, he says, "prose comes in whenever the subject, being more familiar,

is unsuited to the majestic English iambic." And he goes on : "Shakespeare is the king of poetic rhythm and style, as well as the king of the realm of thought ; along with his dazzling prose, Shakespeare has succeeded in giving us the most varied, the most harmonious verse which has ever sounded upon the human ear since the verse of the Greeks." M. Henry Cochin, the writer of this sentence, deserves our gratitude for it ; it would not be easy to praise Shakespeare, in a single sentence, more justly. And when a foreigner and a Frenchman writes thus of Shakespeare, and when Goethe says of Milton, in whom there was so much to repel Goethe rather than to attract *him*, that "nothing has been ever done so entirely in the sense of the Greeks as *Samson Agonistes*," and that "Milton is in very truth a poet whom we must treat with all reverence," then we understand what constitutes a European recognition of poets and poetry as contradistinguished from a merely national recognition, and that in favour both of Milton and of Shakespeare the judgment of the high court of appeal has finally gone.

I come back to M. Renan's praise of glory, from which I started. Yes, real glory is a most serious thing, glory authenticated by the Amphictyonic Court of final appeal, definitive glory. And even for poets and poetry, long and difficult as may be the process of arriving at the right award, the right award comes at last, the definitive glory rests where it is deserved. Every establishment of such a real glory is good and wholesome for mankind at large, good and wholesome for the nation which produced the poet crowned with it. To the poet himself it can seldom do harm ; for he, poor man, is in his grave, probably, long before his glory crowns him.

Wordsworth has been in his grave for some thirty years, and certainly his lovers and admirers cannot flatter themselves that this great and steady light of glory as yet shines over him. He is not fully recognised at home ; he is not recognised at all abroad. Yet I firmly believe that the poetical performance of Wordsworth is, after that of Shakespeare and Milton, of which all the world now recognises the worth, undoubtedly the most considerable

in our language from the Elizabethan age to the present time. Chaucer is anterior ; and on other grounds, too, he cannot well be brought into the comparison. But taking the roll of our chief poetical names, besides Shakespeare and Milton, from the age of Elizabeth downwards, and going through it,—Spenser, Dryden, Pope, Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper, Burns, Coleridge, Scott, Campbell, Moore, Byron, Shelley, Keats (I mention those only who are dead),—I think it certain that Wordsworth's name deserves to stand, and will finally stand, above them all. Several of the poets named have gifts and excellences which Wordsworth has not. But taking the performance of each as a whole, I say that Wordsworth seems to me to have left a body of poetical work superior in power, in interest, in the qualities which give enduring freshness, to that which any one of the others has left.

But this is not enough to say. I think it certain, further, that if we take the chief poetical names of the Continent since the death of Moliere, and, omitting Goethe, confront the remaining names with that of Wordsworth, the result is the same. Let us take Klopstock, Lessing, Schiller, Uhland, Ruckert, and Heine for Germany ; Filicaia, Aifieri, Manzoni, and Leopardi for Italy ; Racine, Boileau, Voltaire, Andr Chlnier, Beranger, Lamartine, Musset, M. Victor Hugo (he has been so long celebrated that although he still lives I may be permitted to name him) for France. Several of these, again, have evidently gifts and excellences to which Wordsworth can make no pretension. But in real poetical achievement it seems to me indubitable that to Wordsworth, here again, belongs the palm. It seems to me that Wordsworth has left behind him a body of poetical work which wears, and will wear better on the whole than the performance of any one of these personages, so far more brilliant and celebrated, most of them, than the homely poet of Rydal. Wordsworth's performance in poetry is on the whole, in power, in interest, in the qualities which give enduring freshness, superior to theirs.

This is a high claim to make for Wordsworth. But if it is a just claim, if Wordsworth's place among the

poets who have appeared in the last two or three centuries is after Shakespeare, Moliere, Milton, Goethe, indeed, but before all the rest, then in time Wordsworth will have his due. We shall recognise him in his place, as we recognise Shakespeare and Milton ; and not only we ourselves shall recognise him but he will be recognised by Europe also. Meanwhile, those who recognise him already may do well, perhaps, to ask themselves whether there are not in the case of Wordsworth certain special obstacles which hinder or delay his due recognition by others, and whether these obstacles are not in some measure removable.

The *Excursion* and the *Prelude*, his poems of greatest bulk, are by no means Wordsworth's best work. His best work is in his shorter pieces, and many indeed are there of these which are of first-rate excellence. But in his seven volumes the pieces of high merit are mingled with a mass of pieces very inferior to them ; so inferior to them that it seems wonderful how the same poet should have produced both. Shakespeare frequently has lines and passages in a strain quite false, and which are entirely unworthy of him. But one can imagine his smiling if one could meet him in the Elysian Fields and tell him so ; smiling and replying that he knew it perfectly well himself, and what did it matter ? But with Wordsworth the case is different. Work altogether inferior, work quite uninspired, flat and dull, is produced by him with evident unconsciousness of its defects, and he presents it to us with the same faith and seriousness as his best work. Now a drama or an epic fill the mind, and one does not look beyond them ; but in a collection of short pieces the impression made by one piece requires to be continued and sustained by the piece following. In reading Wordsworth the impression made by one of his fine pieces is too often dulled and spoiled by a very inferior piece coming after it.

Wordsworth composed verses during a space of some sixty years ; and it is no exaggeration to say that within one single decade of those years, between 1798 and 1808, almost all his really first-rate work was produced. A

mass of inferior work remains, work done before and after this golden prime, imbedding the first-rate work and clogging it, obstructing our approach to it, chilling, not unfrequently, the high-wrought mood with which we leave it. To be recognised far and wide as a great poet, to be possible and receivable as a classic, Wordsworth needs to be relieved of a great deal of the poetical baggage which now encumbers him. To administer this relief is indispensable, unless he is to continue to be a poet for the few only,—a poet valued far below his real worth by the world.

There is another thing. Wordsworth classified his poems not according to any commonly received plan of arrangement but according to a scheme of mental physiology. He has poems of the fancy, poems of the imagination, poems of sentiment and reflection, and so on. His categories are ingenious but far-fetched, and the result of employment of them is unsatisfactory. Poems are separated one from another which possess a kinship of subject or of treatment far more vital and deep than the supposed unity of mental origin, which was Wordsworth's reason for rejoining them with others.

The tact of the Greeks in matters of this kind was infallible. We may rely upon it that we shall not improve upon the classification adopted by the Greeks for kinds of poetry; that their categories of epic, dramatic, lyric, and so forth, have a natural propriety, and should be adhered to. It may sometimes seem doubtful to which of two categories a poem belongs; whether this or that poem is to be called, for instance, narrative or lyric, lyric or elegiac. But there is to be found in every good poem a strain, a predominant note, which determines the poem as belonging to one of these kinds rather than the other; and here is the best proof of the value of the classification and of the advantage of adhering to it. Wordsworth's poems will never produce their due effect until they are freed from their present artificial arrangement, and grouped more naturally.

Disengage from the quantity of inferior work which now obscures them, the best poems of Wordsworth, I hear many people say, would indeed stand out in great beauty, but they would prove to be very few in number, scarcely more than half a dozen. I maintain, on the other hand, that what strikes me with admiration, what establishes in my opinion Wordsworth's superiority, is the great and ample body of powerful work which remains to him, even after all his inferior work has been cleared away. He gives us so much to rest upon, so much which communicates his spirit and engages ours!

This is of very great importance. If it were a comparison of single pieces, or of three or four pieces, by each poet, I do not say that Wordsworth would stand decisively above Gray, or Burns, or Coleridge, or Keats, or Manzoni, or Heine. It is in this ampler body of powerful work that I find his superiority. His good work itself, his work which counts, is not all of it, of course, of equal value. Some kinds of poetry are in themselves lower kinds than others. The ballad kind is a lower kind; the didactic kind, still more, is a lower kind. Poetry of this latter sort counts, too, sometimes, by its biographical interest partly, not by its poetical interest pure and simple; but then this can only be when the poet producing it has the power and importance of Wordsworth, a power and importance which he assuredly did not establish by such didactic poetry alone. Altogether, it is, I say, by the great body of powerful and significant work which remains to him, after every reduction and deduction has been made, that Wordsworth's superiority is proved.

To exhibit this body of Wordsworth's best work, to clear away obstructions from around it, and to let it speak for itself, is what every lover of Wordsworth should desire. Until this has been done, Wordsworth, whom we, to whom he is dear, all of us know and feel to be so great a poet, has not had a fair chance before the world. When once it has been done, he will make his way best, not by our advocacy of him, but by his own worth and power. We may safely leave him to make his way thus, we who

believe that a superior worth and power in poetry finds in mankind a sense responsive to it and disposed at last to recognise it. Yet at the outset, before he has been duly known and recognised, we may do Wordsworth a service, perhaps by indicating in what his superior power and worth will be found to consist, and in what it will not.

Long ago, in speaking of Homer, I said that the noble and profound application of ideas to life is the most essential part of poetic greatness. I said that a great poet receives his distinctive character of superiority from his application, under the conditions immutably fixed by the laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth, from his application, I say, to his subject, whatever it may be, of the ideas

"On man, on nature, and on human life,"

which he has acquired for himself. The line quoted is Wordsworth's own ; and his superiority arises from his powerful use, in his best pieces, his powerful application to his subject, of ideas "on man, on nature, and on human life."

Voltaire, with his signal acuteness, most truly remarked that "no nation has treated in poetry moral ideas with more energy and depth than the English nation." And he adds : "There, it seems to me, is the great merit of the English poets." Voltaire does not mean, by "treating in poetry moral ideas," the composing moral and didactic poems ;—that brings us but a very little way in poetry. He means just the same thing as was meant when I spoke above "of the noble and profound application of ideas to life" ; and he means the application of these ideas under the conditions fixed for us by the laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth. If it is said that to call these ideas *moral* ideas is to introduce a strong and injurious limitation, I answer that it is to do nothing of the kind, because moral ideas are really so main a part of human life. The question, *how to live*, is itself a moral idea ; and it is the question which most interests every man, and with which in some way or other, he is perpetually occupied. A large sense is of course to be given

to the term *moral.* Whatever bears upon the question, "how to live," comes under it.

"Nor love thy life, nor hate; but, what thou liv'st.
Live well ; how long or short, permit to heaven."

In these fine lines Milton utters, as every one at once perceives, a moral idea. Yes, but so too, when Keats consoles the forward-bending lover on the Grecian Urn, the lover arrested and presented in immortal relief by the sculptor's hand before he can kiss, with the line,

"For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair"—

he utters a moral idea. When Shakespeare says that

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep,"

he utters a moral idea.

Voltaire was right in thinking that the energetic and profound treatment of moral ideas, in this large sense, is what distinguishes the English poetry. He sincerely meant praise, not dispraise or hint of limitation ; and they err who suppose that poetic limitation is a necessary consequence of the fact, the fact being granted as Voltaire states. If what distinguishes the greatest poets is their powerful and profound application of ideas to life, which surely no good critic will deny, then to prefix to the term ideas here the term moral makes hardly any difference, because human life itself is in so preponderating a degree moral.

It is important, therefore, to hold fast to this : that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life ; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life,—to the question : How to live ? Morals are often treated in a narrow and false fashion ; they are bound up with systems of thought and belief which have had their day ; they are fallen into the hands of pedants and professional dealers ; they grow tiresome to some of us. We find attraction, at times, even in a poetry of

revolt against them ; in a poetry which might take for its motto Omar Khayam's words : "Let us make up in the tavern for the time which we have wasted in the mosque." Or we find attractions in a poetry indifferent to them ; in a poetry where the contents may be what they will, but where the form is studied and exquisite. We delude ourselves in either case ; and the best cure for our delusion is to let our minds rest upon that great and inexhaustible word *life*, until we learn to enter into its meaning. A poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against *life* ; a poetry of indifference towards moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards *life*.

Epictetus had a happy figure for things like the play of the senses, or literary form and finish, or argumentative ingenuity, in comparison with "the best and master thing," for us, as he called it, the concern, how to live. Some people were afraid of them, he said, or they disliked and undervalued them. Such people were wrong ; they were unthankful or cowardly. But the things might also be over-prized, and treated as final when they are not. They bear to life the relation which inns bear to home. "As if a man, journeying home, and finding a nice inn on the road, and liking it, were to stay for ever at the inn ! Man, thou hast forgotten thine object ; thy journey was not *to* this, but *through* this. 'But this inn is taking.' And how many other inns, too, are taking, and how many fields and meadows ! but as places of passage merely. You have an object, which is this : to get home, to do your duty to your family, friends, and fellow-countrymen, to attain inward freedom, serenity, happiness, contentment. Style takes your fancy, arguing takes your fancy, and you forget your home and want to make your abode with them and to stay with them, on the plea that they are taking. Who denies that they are taking ? but as places of passage, as inns. And when I say this, you suppose me to be attacking the care for style, the care for argument. I am not ; I attack the resting in them, not the looking to the end which is beyond them."

Now, when we come across a poet like Theophile Gautier, we have a poet who has taken up his abode at an

inn, and never got farther. There may be inducements to this or that one of us, at this or that moment, to find delight in him, to cleave to him ; but, after all, we do not change the truth about him,—we only stay ourselves in his inn along with him. And when we come across a poet like Wordsworth, who sings

"Of truth, of grandeur, beauty, love and hope,
And melancholy fear subdued by faith,
Of blessed consolations in distress,
Of moral strength and intellectual power,
Of joy in widest commonalty spread"—

then we have a poet intent on "the best and master thing," and who prosecutes his journey home. We say, for brevity's sake, that he deals with *life*, because he deals with that in which life really consists. This is what Voltaire means to praise in the English poets,—this dealing with what is really life. But always it is the mark of the greatest poets that they deal with it ; and to say that the English poets are remarkable for dealing with it, is only another way of saying what is true, that in poetry the English genius has especially shown its power.

Wordsworth deals with it, and his greatness lies in his dealing with it so powerfully. I have named a number of celebrated poets above all of whom he, in my opinion, deserves to be placed. He is to be placed above poets like Voltaire, Dryden, Pope, Lessing, Schiller, because these famous personages, with a thousand gifts and merits, never, or scarcely ever, attain the distinctive accent and utterance of the high and genuine poets—

"Quique pii vates et Phoebo digna locuti,"

at all. Burns, Keats, Heine, not to speak of others in our list, have this accent ;—who can doubt it ? And at the same time they have treasures of humour, felicity, passion, for which in Wordsworth we shall look in vain. Where, then, is Wordsworth's superiority ? It is here ; he deals with more of *life* than they do ; he deals with *life*, as a whole, more powerfully.

No Wordsworthian will doubt this. Nay, the fervent Wordsworthian will add, as Mr. Leslie Stephen does, that Wordsworth's poetry is precious because his philosophy is sound; that his "ethical system is as distinctive and capable of exposition as Bishop Butler's"; that his poetry is informed by ideas which "fall spontaneously into a scientific system of thought." But we must be on our guard against the Wordsworthians if we want to secure for Wordsworth his due rank as a poet. The Wordsworthians are apt to praise him for the wrong things, and to lay far too much stress upon what they call his philosophy. His poetry is the reality, his philosophy,—so far, at least, as it may put on the form and habit of "a scientific system of thought," and the more that it puts them on,—is the illusion. Perhaps we shall one day learn to make this proposition general, and to say: Poetry is the reality, philosophy, the illusion. But in Wordsworth's case, at any rate, we cannot do him justice until we dismiss his formal philosophy.

The *Excursion* abounds with philosophy, and therefore the *Excursion* is to the Wordsworthian what it never can be to the disinterested lover of poetry,—a satisfactory work. "Duty exists," says Wordsworth, in the *Excursion*; and then he proceeds thus—

"... Immutably survive,
For our support, the measures and the forms,
Which an abstract Intelligence supplies:
Whose kingdom is, where time and space are not."

And the Wordswoathian is delighted, and thinks that here is a sweet; union of philosophy and poetry. But the disinterested lover of poetry will feel that the lines carry us really not a step further than the proposition which they would interpret; that they are a tissue of elevated but abstract verbiage, alien to the very nature of poetry.

Or let us come direct to the centre of Wordsworth's

philosophy, as "an ethical system, as distinctive and capable of systematical exposition as Bishop Butler's"—

" . . . One adequate support
For the calamities of mortal life
Exists, one only ;—an assured belief
That the procession of our fate, howe'er
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power ;
Whose everlasting purposes embrace
All accidents, converting them to good."

That is doctrine such as we hear in church too, religious and philosophic doctrine ; and the attached Wordsworthian love passages of such doctrine, and brings them forward in proof of his poet's excellence. But, however true the doctrine may be, it has, as here presented, none of the characters of *poetic* truth, the kind of truth which we require from a poet, and in which Wordsworth is really strong.

Even the "intimations" of the famous Ode, those corner-stones of the supposed philosophic system of Wordsworth, —the idea of the high instincts and affections coming out in childhood, testifying of a divine home recently left, and fading away as our life proceeds,—this idea, of undeniable beauty as a play of fancy, has itself not the character of poetic truth of the best kind ; it has no real solidity. The instinct of delight in Nature and her beauty had no doubt extraordinary strength in Wordsworth himself as a child. But to say that universally this instinct is mighty in childhood, and tends to die away afterwards, is to say what is extremely doubtful. In many people, perhaps with the majority of educated persons, the love of nature is nearly imperceptible at ten years' age, but strong and operative at thirty. In general we may say of these high instincts of early childhood, the base of the alleged systematic philosophy of Wordsworth, what Thucydides says of the early achievements of the Greek race : "It is impossible to speak with certainty of what is so remote ; but from all that we can really investigate, I should say that they were no very great things."

Finally, the "scientific system of thought" in Wordsworth gives us at last such poetry as this, which the devout Wordsworthian accepts—

"O for the coming of that glorious time
When, prizing knowledge as her noblest wealth
And best protection, this Imperial Realm,
While she exacts allegiance, shall admit
An obligation, on her part, to *teach*
Them who are born to serve her and obey ;
Binding herself by statute to secure,
For all the children whom her soil maintains,
The rudiments of letters, and inform
The mind with moral and religious truth."

Wordsworth calls Voltaire dull, and surely the production of these un-Voltairian lines must have been imposed on him as a judgment ! One can hear them being quoted at Social Science Congress ; one can call up the whole scene. A great room in one of our dismal provincial towns ; dusty air and jaded afternoon daylight ; benches full of men with bald heads and women in spectacles ; an orator lifting up his face from a manuscript written within and without to declaim these lines of Wordsworth ; and in the soul of any poor child of nature who may have wandered in thither, an unutterable sense of lamentation, and mourning, and woe !

"But turn we," as Wordsworth says, "from these bald, bad men," the haunters of Social Science Congresses. And let us be on our guard, too, against the exhibitors and extollers of a "scientific system of thought" in Wordsworth's poetry. The poetry will never be seen aright while they thus exhibit it. The cause of its greatness is simple, and may be told quite simply. Wordsworth's poetry is great because of the extraordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties ; and because of the extraordinary power with which, in case after case, he shows us this joy, and renders it so as to make us share it.

The source of joy from which he thus draws is the truest and most unfailing source of joy accessible to man. It is also accessible universally. Wordsworth brings us word, therefore, according to his own strong and characteristic line, he brings us word

"Of joy in widest commonalty spread."

Here is an immense advantage for a poet. Wordsworth tells of what all seek, and tells of it at its truest and best source, and yet a source where all may go and draw for it.

Nevertheless, we are not to suppose that everything is precious which Wordsworth, standing even at this perennial and beautiful source, may give us. Wordsworthians are apt to talk as if it must be. They will speak with the same reverence of *The Sailor's Mother*, for example, as of *Lucy Gray*. They do their master harm by such lack of discrimination. *Lucy Gray* is a beautiful success ; *The Sailor's Mother* is a failure. To give aright what he wishes to give, to interpret and render successfully, is not always within Wordsworth's own command. It is within no poet's command ; here is the part of the Muse, the inspiration, the God, the "not ourselves." In Wordsworth's case, the accident, for so it may almost be called, of inspiration, is of peculiar importance. No poet, perhaps, is so evidently filled with a new and sacred energy when the inspiration is upon him ; no poet, when it fails him, is so left "weak as is a breaking wave." I remember hearing him say that "Goethe's poetry was not inevitable enough." The remark is striking and true ; no line in Goethe, as Goethe said himself, but its maker knew well how it came there. Wordsworth is right; Goethe's poetry is not inevitable ; not inevitable enough. But Wordsworth's poetry, when he is at his best, is inevitable, as inevitable as Nature herself. It might seem that Nature not only gave him the matter for his poem but wrote his poem for him. He has no style. He was too conversant with Milton not to catch at times his master's manner, and he has fine Miltonic lines ; but

he has no assured poetic style of his own, like Milton. When he seeks to have a style he falls into ponderosity and pomposity. In the *Excursion* we have his style, as an artistic product of his own creation ; and although Jeffrey completely failed to recognise Wordsworth's real greatness, he was yet not wrong in saying of the *Excursion*, as a work of poetic style : "This will never do." And yet magical as is that power, which Wordsworth has not, of assured and possessed poetic style, he has something which is an equivalent for it.

Every one who has any sense for these things feels the subtle turn, the heightening, which is given to a poet's verse by his genius for style. We can feel it in

"After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well"—

of Shakespeare ; in the

" . . . though fall'n on evil days,
On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues"—

of Milton. It is the incomparable charm of Milton's power of poetic style which gives such worth to *Paradise Regained*, and makes a great poem of a work in which Milton's imagination does not 'soar high.' Wordsworth has in constant possession, and at command, no style of this kind ; but he had too poetic a nature, and had read the great poets too well, not to catch, as I have already remarked, something of it occasionally. We find it not only in his Miltonic lines ; we find it in such a phrase as this, where the manner is his own, not Milton's—

" . . . the fierce confederate storm
Of sorrow barricaded evermore
Within the walls of cities" ;

although even here, perhaps, the power of style, which is undeniable, is more properly that of eloquent prose than the subtle heightening and change wrought by genuine poetic style. It is style, again, and the elevation given by style, which chiefly makes the effectiveness of *Laodameia*. Still the right sort of verse to choose

from Wordsworth, if we are to seize his true and most characteristic form of expression, is a line like this from *Michael*—

> "And never lifted up a single stone."

There is nothing subtle in it, no heightening, no study of poetic style, strictly so called, at all ; yet it is expression of the highest and most truly expressive kind.

Wordsworth owed much to Burns, and a style of perfect plainness, relying for effect solely on the weight and force of that which with entire fidelity it utters, Burns could show him:

> "The poor inhabitant below
> Was quick to learn and wise to know,
> And keenly felt the friendly glow
> And softer flame ;
> But thoughtless follies laid him low
> And stain'd his name."

Every one will be conscious of a likeness here to Wordsworth ; and if Wordsworth did great things with this nobly plain manner, we must remember, what indeed he himself would always have been forward to acknowledge, that Burns used it before him.

Still Wordsworth's use of it has something unique and unmatchable. Nature herself seems, I say, to take the pen out of his hand, and to write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power. This arises from two causes : from the profound sincereness with which Wordsworth feels his subject, and also from the profoundly sincere and natural character of his subject itself. He can and will treat such a subject with nothing but the most plain, firsthand, almost austere naturalness. His expression may often be called bald, as, for instance, in the poem of *Resolution and Independence* ; but it is bald as the bare mountain tops are bald, with a baldness which is full of grandeur.

Wherever we meet with the successful balance, in Wordsworth, of profound truth of subject with profound

truth of execution, he is unique. His best poems are those which most perfectly exhibit this balance. I have a warm admiration for *Laodameia* and for the great *Ode* but if I am to tell the very truth, I find *Laodameia* not wholly free from something artificial, and the great *Ode* not wholly free from something declamatory. If I had to pick out poems of a kind most perfectly to show Wordsworth's unique power, I should rather choose poems such as *Michael*, *The Fountain*, *The Highland Reaper*. And poems with the peculiar and unique beauty which distinguishes these, Wordsworth produced in considerable number ; besides very many other poems of which the worth, although not so rare as the worth of these, is still exceedingly high.

On the whole, then, as I said at the beginning, not only is Wordsworth eminent by reason of the goodness of his best work, but he is eminent also by reason of the great body of good work which he has left to us. With the ancients I will not compare him. In many respects the ancients are far above us, and yet there is something that we demand which they can never give. Leaving the ancients, let us come to the poets and poetry of Christendom. Dante, Shakespeare, Moliere, Milton, Goethe, are altogether larger and more splendid luminaries in the poetical heaven than Wordsworth. But I know not where else, among the moderns, we are to find his superiors.

To disengage the poems which show his power, and to present them to the English-speaking public and to the world, is the object of this volume. I by no means say that it contains all which in Wordsworth's poems is interesting. Except in the case of *Margaret*, a story composed separately from the rest of the *Excursion*, and which belongs to a different part of England, I have not ventured on detaching portions of poems, or on giving any piece otherwise than as Wordsworth himself gave it. But under the conditions imposed by this reserve, the volume contains, I think, everything, or nearly everything, which may best serve him with the majority of lovers of poetry, nothing which may disserve him.

I have spoken lightly of Wordsworthians; and if we are to get Wordsworth recognised by the public and by the world, we must recommend him not in the spirit of a clique, but in the spirit of disinterested lovers of poetry. But I am a Wordsworthian myself. I can read with pleasure and edification *Peter Bell*, and the whole series of *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, and the address to Mr. Wilkinson's spade, and even the *Thanksgiving Ode* ;—everything of Wordsworth, I think, except *Vaudracour and Julia*. It is not for nothing that one has been brought up in the veneration of a man so truly worthy of homage ; that one has seen him and heard him, lived in his neighbourhood, and been familiar with his country. No Wordsworthian has a tenderer affection for this pure and sage master than I, or is less really offended by his defects. But Wordsworth is something more than the pure and sage master of a small band of devoted followers, and we ought not to rest satisfied until he is seen to be what he is. He is one of the very chief glories of English Poetry ; and by nothing is England so glorious as by her poetry. Let us lay aside every weight which hindres our getting him recognised as this, and let our one study be to bring to pass, as widely as possible and as truly as possible, his own word concerning his poems : "They will co-operate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society, and will, in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser, better, and happier."

———

WORDSWORTH

(*Critical Analysis Exposition*)

Wordsworth's popularity was at its height between 1830 and 1840, and particulary at Cambridge. His recognition was rather slow, and Scott finally replaced him in public fame, as Byron replaced Scott. Coleridge's had much to do with the growing popularity of Wordsworth, and Coleridge's influence was strong at Cambridge. A time came when Rydal Mount (Wordsworth's residence from 1813 till his death) became an object of pligrimage. His popularity began to wane before the rising fame of Tennyson. As Arnold thinks, Wordsworth never had large public—he has fit audience, though few. Yet in bulk and quality of poetic production Wordsworth stands next to Shakespeare and Milton.

What prevents Wordsworth's proper recognition :

Wordsworth is not truly represented by his larger poems, *Excursion* and *Prelude*. His best work is in his shorter poems. Wordsworth wrote much, for he had been active for a period of sixty years, but it is not all poetry turned off at the white heat of imagination. He had little sense of humour, and every utterance of his muse, however flat and dull, he treated with profound respect. Much inferior stuff is thus mixed up with his poetry. This needs to be disengaged before he can be properly appreciated. Secondly, Wordsworth's classification of his poems is against him—poems of the fancy, poems of the imagination, poems of reflection and sentiment, and so on. In this arrangement poems that are of kindred interest are separated from one another. Unless freed from this artificial arrangement, Wordsworth's poems can never receive their due praise. After his inferior work is cut out, he is left with a considerable body of excellent poetry.

Wordsworth's true position

Wordsworth's true position is to be judged by what is left to him after the elimination of the work of his uninspired moments. According to Arnold, poetic greatness lies in a noble application of ideas to life. This is what we find in wordsworth's best poetry—the application of ideas to life—or rather the interpretation of life under conditions fixed by the laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth. Voltaire says that no nation has treated moral ideas with more energy and depth than the English nation. Arnold points out that treating moral ideas in poetry does not mean writing moral and didactic poems. It comes to the same thing as the noble and profound application of ideas to life. When Keats says in his *Ode to a Grecian Urn* :

For ever with thou love, and she be fair;

or when Shakespeare says :

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep ;

it is a moral idea. The question—how to live—is a moral idea, and it is a question that matters for everybody. So Arnold goes on to say that a poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against life. From this it will appear that Arnold considers literary form and finish as subordinate to the matter or substance of poetry. How to live—that is, to use a phrase of Epictetus, 'the best and master thing' with which alone poetry can be concerned.

Why is Wordsworth so great and even superior to such poets as Voltaire, Pope, Lessing, Schiller? Because Wordsworth deals with life so powerfully. Leslie Stephen values Wordsworth's poetry for its philosophy, or because his poetry easily lends itself to a philosophical exposition. But Wordsworth should be valued for his poetry, and his philosophy, if he has any, is but detrimental to his poetry. Or as Arnold puts it, his poetry is the reality ; his philosophy the illusion. The less Wordsworth has to do with philosophy the better for him. Even the underlying idea of his *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*—the high instincts and affections manifesting

themselves in childhood as a link with a divine home recently left and then disappearing as we advance in life—is nothing but a play of fancy—and has not the poetic truth of the best kind. Then, again, what Wordsworth states to be true in his own case as regards his love of nature, which started in his early years, may not be true in the case of others.

Wordsworth sings of joy in widest commonalty spread. Wordsworth discovers this joy in nature in the simple, primary affections and duties, and makes it accessible to his readers. The greatness of his poetry lies in this.

Wordsworth's Style

Wordsworth has no assured poetic style. When Wordsworth writes under inspiration, his poetry is as inevitable as Nature herself. Sometimes he seems to catch the manner of Milton; there are Miltonic lines in his poetry. But his conscious efforts at style end in ponderosity and pomposity as in *The Excursion*. The subtle turn, the heightening which is the property of style, is rare in Wordsworth. We feel it in Shakespeare's line :

> After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well.

It may be contrasted with Wordsworth's line in *Michael* :

> And never lifted up a single stone.

There is no heightening here, but the bare literalness of the fact brings home to us the pathos and poignancy. Wordsworth might have owed something to Burns's style of perfect plainness. Wordsworth has a nobly plain manner. When he writes in this nobly plain manner, Arnold says that Nature herself seems to take the pen out of his hand, and to write for him with a bare, sheer, penetrating power.

NOTES

Paragraph 1. **More money........alone** Coleridge's influence at Cambridge made Wordsworth's poetry popular there. **His own heightened......thing**—exaggerated statement. We **must......it**—we must accept his statement with a grain of salt. **So established...poetry**—so appealing to those who are discriminating readers of poetry. **His poetry......shoe-string**

—his poetry remained unsold. **Scott......him**—Scott overshadowed Wordsworth in popularity, and Byron later overshadowed Scott in popularity.

Paragraph 2. **The death of Byron**—Byron died in 1824. **Make......Wordsworth**—give a chance to Wordsworth to be popular with the reading public. **Scott too genuine......generously**—Scott was a genuine literary man, and appreciated Wordsworth's love of nature and insight, and his truthful reproduction of local features of the district where he lived, and with which he was so familiar. **Rydal Mount**—Wordsworth removed to Rydal Mount in 18‹3 and lived here till his death. The house stood on the rocky side of Nab Scar, above Rydal Lıke.

Paragraph 3. **Suffrage—verdict.**

Paragraph 4. **To tenth rate critics.........impertinence**—The fact is that the public is more or less indifferent to Wordsworth's poetry. Critics and compilers of low order would not dare offend against the public taste. And they tolerate light-hearted and sceptical references to Wordsworth's poetry.

Paragraph 5. **Has......deserts**—has till now receive his proper recognition. **Renan**—Joseph Ernest Renan (1823-1892). French philosopher. **This was......more**—Goethe thought of an intellectual fellowship ; composed of the civilized nations of the world, their business being to determine collectively the merits of literary works. **A glory highly**—a glory which cannot certainly be classed with vanity. **Tribunal......acceptance**—*i.e.,* a court of academy making literary awards conscientiously and independently of country and nation, and recommending the finest literary works to the world.

Paragraph 6. **It is so easy.........it**—one may feel now and then distrust of things in which one has pride and satisfaction ; hence the necessity of an international academy or federation. **Nebuchadnezzar**—the greatest king of Assyria ; his reign lasted forty-three years (B.C. 604-551). **Our upper......materialised**—the English upper class is given to the pursuit of low materialistic aims and ends, and

is without any culture. **Our vulgarised**—the English middle class has a defective type of religion, a narrow range of intellect and knowledge, a stunted sense of beauty and low standard of manner. **Our......brutalised**—the English lower class is addicted to bear, gin and fun.

Paragraph 7. **Now poetry......truth**—poetry is the best record of human thoughts on life and nature. **Meanwhile, our own conviction......infatuation**—The superiority of English poetry is beyond question, but the English do not seem to be very sure of it, and so when they praise Shakespeare, they start boosting him, and it is indicative of taking foolish pride in their national poet.

Paragraph 8. **Anti-Gallican cynic**—*i.e.*, a critic who hates the French. **In whom there was so much......attract him**—Milton's extreme Puritanism and consequent narrowness of outlook must have repelled Goethe. **Samson Agonistes**—The Old Testament hero whose prodigious strength depended on the fact that his hair had never been cut. He was famous for remarkable feats by which he routed his enemies, the famed Philistines. Finally he became infatuated with a Philistine woman, Delilah, who warmed out of him his secret and delivered him over to his enemies. His eyes were put out and he was forced to grind meal in the prison-house. When, at the great feast of the Philistine god, Dagon, he was brought in to make sport for the people, he prayed to Jehova so fervently that his strength returned and he was able to pull down the two great pillars that supported the entire edifice. He and all, who were present, were killed. Milton made Samson the hero of his drama, modelled on the Greek tragedy.

Paragraph 9. **Amphictyonic Court**—in Greece a famous union pledge to observe and enforce certain inter-tribal principles of right ; it met twice each year and deputies came from all the states involved. The council lasted into Roman Imperial time.

Paragraph 10. **Chaucer...comparison**—Chaucer belongs to an earlier age. and cannot be brought into comparison with Wordsworth.

Paragraph 11. **Death of Moliere**—Moliere died in 1673. He was the greatest French dramatist, and one of the greatest comic dramatists of all literature. **It seems to me...Rydal**—Compared with the Continental poets, German, Italian and French, Wordsworth has left a body of poetical work that will endure, however diverse the gifts to which Wordsworth has no claim, the Continental poets might display.

Paragraph 12. **There are not......removable**—there are not certain drawbacks which withhold Wordsworth's due recognition and which cannot be removed to reveal the excellence of his poetry.

Paragraph 13. **So inferior.........both**—what hinders the due recognition of Wordsworth is the mix-up of his good and bad poetry, due to his personal classification of his poetry, and then again much of his poetry is so bad that one might wonder that it could have come from the pen of the same poet. **Elysian Fields**—the Paradise or Happy Lands of the Greek poets from Elysium, the abode of the blessed in Greek mythology. **Wordsworth altogether inferior............work**—Wordsworth takes equally seriously his good and bad poetry. He is not even remotely conscious of the inferiority of the stuff, and recommends it to the public with his work. His total lack of humour is responsible for this state of things.

Paragraph 14. **Imbedding...........it**—*i.e.*, seriously interfering with the impression that is produced by his first-rate work, which is inseparably mixed with the inferior stuff. **Needs...him**—*i.e.*, the inferior stuff should be separated from his first-rate work before the real excellence of his poetry can be perceived.

Paragraph 15. **Scheme of mental physiology**—*i.e.*, classifying his poem as those of imagination, or of fancy, or of sentiment and reflection. Arnold considers this a wrong basis of classification. **His categories...unsatisfactory**—he has gone out of the natural method in so classifying his poems, and the effect is very disappointing. **Poems ......others**—poems which are allied in character, have been put away one from another as the result of this

classification, and they fail to evoke the interest which they otherwise would have done.

Paragraph 16. **The fact.........infallible**—The Greeks showed the most sensible way of classifying poetry. **Have ......to**—the Greek method of classifying poetry is basically correct, and should be followed. **I maintain......away**—after all bad poetry, written by Wordsworth, has been put away, a substantial body of poetry will be left to Wordsworth, and it will clearly establish his claim to greatness.

Paragraph 18. **Manzoni**—(1785—1873),Italian novelist, dramatist and poet. **It is......superiority**—Wordsworth's greatness does not depend on single pieces, but on his massive production. The ballad and didactic kinds are inferior poetry, and should of course be differently valued. His didactic poetry has a value because of its autobiographical element.

Paragraph 19. **We may safely......it**—After the inferior kind of work has been extracted from Wordsworth's main body of poetry, it may be left to the reading public to discover and appreciate the excellence of his poetry, for good poetry will always appeal to mankind.

Paragraphs 20-21. **On man......life**—from Wordsworth's *Michael.* **Voltaire......poetry**—When Voltaire says that the great merit of English poets lies in treating moral ideas in poetry, he does not mean that English poets have distinguished themselves by writing moral and didactic poetry. According to Arnold, Voltaire means the powerful application of ideas to life. **If it is said......limitation**—to use 'moral' in connection with ideas, used in poetry, does not imply any restriction, however, for ideas are moral. The main question is how to live, and that is a moral idea. **Nor love......heaven**—from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, **Bk. II. Presented......hand**—perpetuated in his pose by the sculptor, and therefore ever held back from his wish, and so delineating his undying love.

Paragraph 22. **They err......it**—they who suppose that Voltaire meant a limitation of the range of English poetry by suggesting that the merit of English poets lies in treat-

ing moral ideas in poetry, are mistaken. Ideas are moral and human life is moral ; so it will be the function of poetry to treat moral ideas.

Paragraph 23. **Morals are......us**—There is no reason why we should confuse the specific treatment of morals by ethical writers, dealings as they do with some system of thought and belief, which may have not passed away, and it is a dull business ; but poetry has a different function. **We find......mosque**—Sometimes a poetry of revolt against conventional morals may attract us, for example, poetry that models itself upon Omar Khayam's teaching that we must make the most of our life on earth. **Omar Khayam**—The 11th century Persian astronomer-poet of Nishapur. The chief of his works is *The Rubaiyat*. This was translated by Edward Fitzgerald in a free rather than a literal version. **Poetry.........exquisite**—moral poetry in which form and expression are highly cultivated, and are therefore superior to content and matter. **We delude ......meaning**—To be attracted by poetry which either defies morals, or is indifferent to moral is to forget that it is life which poetry must interpret, and to exclude moral from it is to distort the meaning of life.

Paragraph 24. **Play of the senses**—sensuousness in poetry. **Argumentative ingenuity**—such as is displayed in eighteenth century poetry. **The best and master thing**—*i.e.*, the interpretation of life. **But the things......not**—The form and technique of poetry are not everything, but sometimes they are made too much of. **Taking**—attractive. **I attack ......them**—style is not everything ; it is matter or content which makes the what it is ; style cannot supersede matter.

Paragraph 25. **Theophile Gautier**—(1811—1871), French poet and novelist. **A Poet.........father**—Theophile Gautier devoted all his attention to style and achieved the quintessence of style. He put forward the doctrine of Art for Art's sake.

Paragraph 26. **Quique pii......locuti**—Pious prophets indeed and men who have said things worthy of Phoebus.

Paragraph 27. **Nay, the fervent Wordsworthian......... thought**—Leslie Stephen bases the greatness of Wordsworth's poetry on the ethical system of thought that can be constructed out of it. Arnold does not believe in this ethical system,

His greatness lies elsewhere. **His poetry......illusion**—The scientific system of thought that may be evolved out of Wordsworth's poetry adds little to its excellence ; he stands or fails by his poetry, and it is in his poetry, and not in the philosophy which may emerge out of it that we must seek his greatness. **Philosophy the illusion**—because philosophy deals with abstractions. **But in Wordsworth's case............philosophy**—Laying aside what philosophy there may be in Wordsworth, we may appreciate all that is excellent in his poetry. **But the disinterested lover......poetry**—There is not the *feel* of poetry in the lines—'Immutably survive......not.' It is mere abstract thought which is put into these lines—and there can be none of the thrill that poetry evokes.

Paragraph 29. **That is doctrine......excellence**—The Wordsworthian praises the poet for false things—the stale religious and philosophical teaching, which tells us nothing new. The greatness of his poetry is retarded by it. Then again this religious and philosophical teaching does not assume the character of poetic truth.

Paragraph 30. **Even the 'Intimations'......solidity**—The underlying idea of the *Intimations of Immortality* has not the character of high poetic truth. It is but a flight of fancy—and it has little basis in truth. The idea is that the child remembers something of the heavenly abode that has not been long left, but the adult entirely loses the vision of this heavenly abode, and gropes blindly in the region of high instincts and affection, which were his heritage in his infancy. **But to say that......doubtful**—Love of Nature developed early in Wordsworth,and he connected it with the high instincts and affection in his childhood, which he traced again to Heaven which lies about us in our infancy.' The point is that what has been true of him may not be true of others. **It is impossible.....things**—From what Thucydides says here it will appear that it is not a satisfactory task to throw light on childhood instincts and affections and to build up a system of philosophy on them will be nothing but a fantasy.

Paragraph 31. **The production..............lines**—Arnold means that Wordsworth has been writing here very dull verses, and he calls Voltaire dull !

Paragraph 32. **Wordsworth's poetry............share it**—Wordsworth discovered the source of joy in the beauty and wonders of Nature, and in the natural affections of the heart and simple duties of life. And with these he deals again and again in poetry. If his greatness lies anywhere, it must be in this attitude of his to life and Nature.

Paragraph 33. **The source.......................universally**—In his dealing with life and Nature, Wordsworth has opened the storehouse of joy to all mankind. So, in his poetry he deals with what we may call universal truth. **Wordsworth it**—Here is the noble and profound application of ideas to life in that Wordsworth has discovered the true source of joy for mankind, and laid it open for everybody to appropriate it.

Paragraph 34. **They will......Lucy Gray**—*Lucy Gray* and *The Sailor's Mother* cannot be classed together. Wordsworth often wrote in uninspired moments, and had turned out much prosaic and matter-of-fact verse. The Wordsworthian makes no distinction between his good verse and his bad verse : he is carried away by his philosophy or ethical system of thought. **It is within...ourselves**—There is an impersonal factor in poetic composition; everything does not depend on what the poet wills or intends. It is something above and beyond the poet—we may call it inspiration or whatever else—which contributes the best to one's poetic composition. **No poet......wave**—Wordsworth writes his best when he is inspired and his worst when he is uninspired. **Goethe's poetry ....enough**—Goethe's poetry was not written always under direct inspiration; it is self-conscious. **But Wordsworth's poetry............herself**—In his best moments (which are rare), Wordsworth's poetry came spontaneously, and the impersonal factor was strong in it; it was not Wordsworth, but as if Nature that wrote the poetry for him. **He.... style**—He has no style in the sense that in his dull moments his poetry is as heavy and pedestrian as it can be, and quite prosaic, but when he writes under inspiration, it is poetry of the inimitable kind. **He was too.......,...Milton**—He had carefully studied Milton, and sometimes there are echoes of Milton in his lines, but he has no command of style like Milton. **He falls...........pomposity**—he writes all that is dull, prosaic

and heavy. **Jeffrey**—Francis Jeffrey (1773-1850), editor of the *Edinburgh Review*. **This......do**—this cannot pass as poetry.

Paragraph 35. **The subtle turn......style**—the startling effect the new wealth of meaning and suggestion, revealed by the sense of style. **Though fallen......tongues**—from *Paradise Lost*, Bk. VII. **The fierce confederate storm...... cities**—from *Recluse*. **There is nothing subtle...........kind**—In the line, quoted from *Michael*, there is little attempt at style, or at evoking associations ; it is the bare fact, stated in bare, naked words, and it produces the necessary effect.

Paragraph 36. **A style.........utters**—Burns's style is noted for sheer nakedness of expression without any attempt at colouring, and it is found to be quite effective because it tells of things as they are, and as they should be. **Nobly plain manner**—*i.e.*, undecorative style with a telling force, reporting things as they are.

Paragraph 37. **Nature......power**—What Arnold calls the nobly plain manner of Wordsworth means his total surrender to Nature or the inspiration of the moment when Wordsworth can write with marvellous simplicity and charm. **This arises...itself**—This becomes possible for Wordsworth because he writes with his eye on the object, as he puts it, and the marvellous simplicity, which he now and then attains, depends on the sincerity of his feeling as well as on the nature of the subject, that engages his attention. **Austere naturalness**—the stark sense of reality. **It is bald.........................grandeur**—the occasional sheer simplicity of expression in Wordsworth appears to have a stark baldness, but it is not without some grandeur—the grandeur of a bare mountain top. Watson says that Wordsworth has 'the deep, authentic mountain thrill.'

Paragraph 38. **Whenever......unique**—Wordsworth is at his best when he combines the truth of subject with the nobly plain manner of expression. **Declamatory**—rhetorical.

Paragraph 39. **In many respects.........................us**—The ancient writers are superior to the modern in their sanity, reasonableness, clearness and perfection of form.

Yet there is...give—We do not find in ancient literature proper criticism of life, emotional fervour, imaginativeness or the Romantic quality.

Paragraph 41. **Clique**—here infatuated admirers of Wordsworth's poetry. **It is for nothing.........country**—Arnold confesses that he learnt to admire Wordsworth, that he read his poetry seriously and became familiar with his country ; but he claims to be a discriminating admirer. **They will............happier**—Here Wordsworth states the purpose of his poetry : his poetry is allied to the kindly human impulses and natural affections of the heart, and can serve to make men wiser, better and happier.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. 1. "Yet I firmly believe that the poetical performance of Wordsworth is after that of Shakespeare and Milton........." *—M. Arnold.*

What prevented the due recognition of Wordsworth, according to Arnold ?

Ans. See *Analysis.*

Wordsworth wrote poetry during a period of some sixty years, and he wrote good poetry as well as bad poetry, the proportion of the latter being certainly greater. Normally considered, a poet cannot for a long period sustain a high level in his production—he cannot be too sure of his inspiration, and in course of time his poetic powers too decline, and it happened that the poetry of his later years is worse than what it was before. Now Wordsworth went on writing, and never cared to notice his flagging inspiration. The fact is that he took himself too seriously ; it could not have occurred to him that he was writing anything fatuous and insignificant with no poetical quality in it, while he could produce something much better. He had little sense of humour ; or as Keats puts it, he was egotistically sublime, and we can well believe that he was supremely and even innocently unconscious of the defects of his poetry, especially such poetry as was written in his dull, uninspired

moments. He kept plodding on, inspiration or no inspiration, and that was the worst of it. Arnold who was a sincere and discriminating reader of Wordsworth, and who was influenced too by Wordsworth's poetry in no small measure, made a point that Wordsworth could have due recognition when the dross is separated from his genuine poetry. Coleridge's influence was strong at Cambridge, and he did something to make Wordsworth popular in the Cambridge circles, but Wordsworth was little known to the public, and the professional critics made light of him.

Arnold, therefore, felt necessary that Wordsworth should be represented by his best specimens and in this category we may find a considerable body of poetry, upon which a real assessment of his genius can be based. And Arnold thinks that excluding Shakespeare and Milton, Wordsworth stands above Spenser, Dryden, Pope, Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper, Burns, Coleridge, Moore, Byron, Shelley, Keats ; and similarly on the Continent, Goethe left out, he is superior to Klopstack, Lessing, Schiller, Uhland, Ruckert, Heine in Germany ; Filicai, Alfieri, Manzoni, Leopardi, in Italy ; Racine, Boileau. Voltaire, Andre Chenier, Beranger, Lamartine, Musset, Victor Hugo in France. The *Excursion* and the *Prelude* are not the poems by which Wordsworth should be judged. He is to be seen at his best in his shorter poems. His arbitrary classification of his poems also hindered his due recognition. The Greek method of classification—epic, dramatic, lyric, and so forth—seems to be more sensible. As arranged by Wordsworth, his poems do not bear the necessary relation to one another in subject-matter and in treatment. These poems need to be rationally classified and re-arranged before they can be properly appreciated.

Voltaire has said that 'no nation has treated in poetry moral ideas with more energy and depth than the English nation'. Treating in poetry moral ideas does not mean writing didactic poetry. The question, how to live, is a moral idea, and poetry is more or less concerned with this question : and this criterion should also be applied to Wordsworth to find out what is best in him. When Keats

writes, "For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair." It is a moral idea. So, it is when Shakespeare writes :

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

Wordsworth had his own idea to set forth:

On man, on nature, and on human life.

This is criticism of life, or the noble and profound application of ideas to life—and it is the function of poetry. And Wordsworth has attempted it in his own way. The task, as Arnold conceived it, was to pick out the poems in which a noble and powerful application of ideas to life was made by Wordsworth. We do not find it in verses where he expounds the idea of duty or Christian ethics, which Arnold quotes. Wordsworth cannot be truly represented by such poetry. He has written good poetry, and in his shorter pieces we find his nobly plain manner—the balance 'of profound truth of subject with profound truth of execution.'

Q. 2. Wherein lies the greatness of Wordsworth's poetry ? Has he any style ?

Ans. See *Analysis*.

Leslie Stephen praises Wordsworth's poetry for wrong things. He thinks highly of Wordsworth's poetry because from it evolves an ethical system as distinctive and capable of exposition as Bishop Butler's. This is a wrong approach to poetry. Arnold is right in saying that Wordsworth's poetry is the reality, and his philosophy, if any, is the illusion. If we take his Ode on the *Intimations of Immortality* it has not the highest kind of poetic truth, while the Wordsworthian may discover profound philosophy in it. It is but a poetic fancy that makes childhood instincts and affections divine in descent, finally fading away with growing years ; it can have no basis in truth. Then, again, Wordsworth's love of Nature, which developed so early in him, may not be true in the case of other people.

Wordsworth's greatness as a poet lies elsewhere than in his exposition of childhood instincts and impulses, or of

Christian ethics. Wordsworth brings to us the joy that Nature offers, the joy that springs from simple primary affections and duties ; and it is with extraordinary perception and insight that he discovers this enduring joy. And he sings of joy in widest commonalty spread. We should not, however, think that every poem dealing with it, is a good one. For example, *The Sailor's Mother* is not as good as *Lucy Gray*. The point is that Wordsworth's mood was not always dependable. There were dull, flat moments in his writing. This explains so much of bad poetry he has written. He said that Goethe's poetry was not inevitable enough. In his own case he was not aware that his poetry was oftener laboured, ponderous and least poetical. It was in rare moments that he could produce poetry that seemed inevitable. And, as Arnold says, it was then that Nature seemed to take pen out of his hand, and to write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power.

The fact is that Wordsworth has no assured style of his own. We look in vain for the subtle turn, the heightening as in such verse :

> After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well,
>
> Or
>
> though fall'n on evil days,
> On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues.

The best that Wordsworth can do is to achieve a bare literalness of fact, which has a telling force; for example, in *Michael*:

> And never lifted up a single stone.

Wordsworth might have learnt something of his nobly plain manner from Burns. He wrote in all sincerity of feeling, and he wrote with his eye on the object, and to these factors he owes his telling force when he is at his best. His expression often appears to be starkly bald, but sometimes it is a baldness full of grandeur—the grandeur of the bare mountain top.

BYRON

When at last I held in my hand the volume of poems which I had chosen from Wordsworth, and began to turn over its pages, there arose in me almost immediately the desire to see beside it, as a companion volume, a like collection of the best poetry of Byron. Alone amongst our poets of the earlier part of this century, Byron and Wordsworth not only furnish material enough for a volume of this kind but also, as it seems to me, they both of them again considerably by being thus exhibited. There are poems of Coleridge and of Keats equal, if not superior, to anything of Byron or Wordsworth; but a dozen pages or two will contain them, and the remaining poetry is of a quality much inferior. Scott never, I think, rises as a poet to the level of Byron and Wordsworth at all. On the other hand, he never falls below his own usual level very far; and by a volume of selections from him, therefore, his effectiveness is not increased. As to Shelley there will be more question; and indeed Mr. Stopford Brooke, whose accomplishments, eloquence, and love of poetry we must all recognise and admire, has actually given us Shelley in such a volume. But for my own part I cannot think that Shelley's poetry, except by snatches and fragments, has value of the good work of Wordsworth and Byron; or that it is possible for even Mr. Stopford Brooke to make up a volume of selection from him which, for real substance, power, and worth, can at all take rank with a like volume from Byron and Wordsworth.

Shelley knew quite well the difference between the achievement of such a poet as Byron and his own. He praises Byron too unreservedly, but he sincerely felt, and he was right in feeling, that Byron was a greater poetical

power than himself. As a man, Shelley is at a number of points immeasurably Byron's superior ; he is a beautiful and enchanting spirit, whose vision, when we call it up, has far more loveliness, more charm for our soul, than the vision of Byron. But all the personal charm of Shelley cannot hinder us from at last discovering in his poetry the incurable want, in general, of a sound subject-matter, and the incurable fault, in consequence of unsubstantiality. Those who extol him as the poet of clouds, the poet of sunsets, are only saying that he did not, in fact, lay hold upon the poet's right subject-matter; and in honest truth, with all his charm of soul and spirit, and with all his gift of musical diction and movement, he never, or hardly ever, did. Except, as I have said, for a few short things and sigle stanzas, his original poetry is less satisfactory than his translations, for in these the subject-matter was found for him. Nay, I doubt whether his delightful Essays and Letters, which deserve to be far more read than they are now, will not resist the wear and tear of time better, and finally, come to stand higher than his poetry.

There remain to be considered Byron and Wordsworth. That Wordsworth affords good material for a volume of selections, and that he gains by having his poetry thus presented, is an old belief of mine which led me lately to make up a volume of poems chosen out of Wordsworth, and to bring it before the public. By its kind reception of the volume, the public seems to show itself a partaker in my belief. Now Byron also supplies plenty of material for a like volume, and he too gains, I think, by being so presented. Mr. Swinburne urges, indeed, that "Byron, who rarely wrote anything either worthless or faultless, can only be judged or appreciated in the mass ; the greatest of his works was in his whole work taken together." It is quite true that Byron rarely wrote anything either worthless or faultless ; it is quite true also that in the appreciation of Byron's power a sense of amount and variety of his work, defective though much of his work, enters justly into our estimate. But although there may be little in Byron's poetry which can be pronounced either worth-

less or faultless, there are portions of it which are far higher in worth and far more free from fault than others. And although, again, the abundance and variety of his production is undoubtedly a proof of his power, yet I question whether by reading everything which he gives us we are so likely to acquire an admiring sense even of his variety and abundance, as by reading what he gave us at his happier moment. Varied and abundant he amply proves himself even by this taken alone. Receive absolutely without omission or compression, follow his whole outpouring, stanza by stanza and line by line from the very commencement to the very end, and he is capable of being tiresome.

Byron has told us himself that the *Giaour* "is but a string of passages." He has made full confession of his own negligence." No one," says he, "has done more through negligence to corrupt the language." This accusation brought by himself against his poems is not just; but when he goes on to say of them that "their faults, whatever they may be, are those of negligence and not of labour," he says what is perfectly true. "*Lara*," he declares, "I wrote while undressing after coming home from balls and masquerades, in the year of revelry, 1814. The *Bride* was written in four, the *Corsair* in ten days." He calls this "a humiliating confession, as it proves my own want of judgment in publishing, and the public's in reading, things which cannot have stamina for permanence." Again he does his poems injustice; the producer of such poems could not but publish them, the public could not but read them. Nor could Byron have produced his work in any other fashion; his poetic work could not have first grown and matured in his own mind, and then came forth as an organic whole; Byron had not enough of the artistic in him for this, nor enough of self-command. He wrote, as he truly tells us, to relieve himself, and he went on writing because he found the relief indispensable. But it was inevitable that works so produced should be, in general, "a string of passages," poured out, as he describes them, with rapidity and excitement, and with new passages constantly suggesting themselves, and added while his work was going through the press. It is

evident that we have here neither deliberate scientific construction, nor yet the instinctive artistic creation of poetic wholes; that to take passage from work produced as Byron's was is very different thing from taking passage out of the *Oedipus* or the *Tempest*, and deprives the poetry far less of its advantage.

Nay, it gives advantage to the poetry, instead of depriving it of any. Byron, I said, has not a great artist's profound and patient skill in combining an action or in developing a character,—a skill which we must watch and follow if we are to do justice to it. But he has a wonderful power of vividly conceiving a single incident, a single situation; of throwing himself upon it, grasping it as if it were real and he saw and left it, and of making us see and feel it too. The *Giaour* is, as he truly called it, "a string of passages," not a work of moving by a deep internal law of development to a necessary end; and our total impression from it cannot but receive from this, its inherent defect, a certain dimness and indistinctness. Butthe incidents of the journey and death of Hassan, in that poem, are conceived and presented, with a vividness not to be surpassed; and our impression from them is correspondingly clear and powerful. In *Lara*, again, there is no adequate development either of the character of the chief personage or of the action of the poem; our total impression of the work is a confused one. Yet such an incident as the disposal of the slain Ezzelin's body passes before our eyes as if we actually saw it. And in the same way as these bursts of incident, bursts of sentiment also, living and vigorous, often occur in the midst of poems which must be admitted to be but weakly-conceived and loosely-combined wholes. Byron cannot but be a gainer by having attention concentrated upon what is vivid, powerful, effective in his work, and withdraw from what is not so.

Byron, I say cannot but be a gainer by this, just as Wordsworth is a gainer by a like proceeding. I esteem Wordsworth's poetry so highly, and the world, in my opinion, has done it such scant justice, that I could not rest satisfied until I had fulfilled, on Wordsworth's behalf, a

long-cherished desire ;—had disengaged, to the best of my power, his good work from the inferior work joined with it, and had placed before the public the body of his good work by itself. To the poetry of Byron the world has ardently paid homage ; full justice from his contemporaries perhaps even more than justice, his torrent of poetry received. His poetry was admired, adored, "with all its imperfections on its head,"—in spite of negligence, in spite of diffuseness, in spite of repetitions, in spite of whatever faults it possessed. His name is still great and brilliant. Nevertheless the hour of irresistible vogue has passed away for him ; even for Byron it could not put pass away. The time has come for him, as it comes for all poets, when he must take his real and permanent place, no longer depending upon the vogue of his own day and upon the enthusiasm of his contemporaries. Whatever we may think of him, we shall not be subjugated by him as they were ; for, as he cannot be for us what he was for them, we cannot admire him so hotly and indiscriminately as they. His faults of negligence, of diffuseness, of repetition, his faults of whatever kind, we shall abundantly feel and unsparingly criticise ; the mere interval of time between us and him make disillusion of this kind inevitable. But how then will Byron stand, if we relieve him too so far as we can, of the encumbrance of his inferior and weakest work, and if we bring before us his best and strongest work in one body together? That is the question which I, who can have myself felt the expiring wave of that mighty influence, but who certainly also regard him, and have long regarded him without illusion, cannot but ask myself, cannot but seek to answer. The present volume is an attempt to provide adequate data for answering it.

Byron has been over-praised, no doubt. "Byron is one of our French superstitions," says M. Edmond Scherer; but where has Byron not been a superstition? He pays now the penalty of this exaggerated worship. "Alone among the English poets his contemporaries, Byron," said M. Taine, "*attient a la cime*,—gets to the top of the poetic mountain." But the idol that M. Taine had this adored M. Scherer is almost for burning. "In Byron," he declares, "there is a remarkable inability ever to lift himself into the region of

real poetic art,—art impersonal and disinterested,—at all. He has fecundity, eloquence, wit, but even these qualities themselves are confined within somewhat narrow limits. He has treated hardly any subject but one,—himself; now the man, in Byron, is of a nature even less sincere than the poet. This beautiful and blighted being is at bottom a coxcomb. He posed all his lieflong."

Our poet could not well meet with more severe and unsympathetic criticism. However, the praise often given to Byron has been so exaggerated as to provoke, perhaps a reaction in which he is unduly disparaged. "As various in composition as Shakespeare himself, Lord Byron has embraced," says Sir Walter Scott, "every topic of human life, and sounded every string on the divine harp, from its slightest to its most powerful and heart-astounding tones." It is not surprising that some one with a cool head should retaliate. on such provocation as this, by saying : "He has treated hardly any subject but one, *himself*." "In the very grand and tremendous drama of *Cain*," says Scott, "Lord Byron has certainly matched Milton on his own ground." And Lord Byron has done all this, Scott adds, "while managing his pen with the careless and negligent ease of a man of quality." Alas, "managing his pen with the careless and negligent ease of a man of quality." Byron wrote in his *Cain*—

> "Souls that dare look the Omnipotent tyrant in
> His everlasting face, and tell him that
> His evil is not good" ;

or he wrote—

> " . . . And *thou* would'st go on aspiring
> To the great double Mysteries ! the *two principles* ! "

One has only to repeat to oneself a line from *Paradise Lost* in order to feel the difference.

Saint-Beuve, speaking of that exquisite master of language, the Italian poet Leopardi, remarks how often we see the alliance, singular thought it may at first sight appear, of the poetical genius with the genius for scholarship and

philology. Dante and Milton are instances which will occur to everyone's mind. Byron is so negligent in his poetical style, he is so often, to say the truth, so slovenly, slipshod, and infelicitous, he is so little haunted by the true artist's fine passion for the correct use and consummate management of words, that he may be described as having for this artistic gift the insensibility of the barbarian; which is perhaps only another and a less flattering way of saying, with Scott, that he "manages his pen with careless and negligent ease of a man of quality." Just of a piece with the rhythm of

> "Dare you await the event of a few minutes'
> Deliberation ?"

or of

> "All shall be void—
> Destroy'd !"

is the diction of

> "Which now is painful to these eyes,
> Which have not seen the sun to rise" ;

or of

> " . . . there let him lay ! ',

or of the famous passage beginning

> "He who hath bent him o'er the dead " ;

with those trailing relatives, that crying grammatical solecism, that inextricable anacolouthon ! To class the work of the author of such things with the work of the authors of such verse as

> "In the dark backward and abysm of time"—

or as

> "Presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line,
> Or the tale of Troy divine"—

is ridiculous. Shakespeare and Milton, with their secret of consummate felicity in diction and movement, are of another and an altogether higher order from Byron, may, for that matter, from Wordsworth also ; from the author of such verse as

> "Sol hath dropt into his harbour"—

or (if Mr. Ruskin pleases) as

"Parching summer hath no warrant"—

as from the author of

"All shall be void—
Destroy'd !"

With a poetical gift and a poetical performance of the very highest order, the slovenliness and tunelessness of much of Byron's production, the pompousness and ponderousness of much of Wordsworth's are incompatible. Let us admit this to the full.

Moreover, while we are hearkening to M. Scherer, and going along with him in his fault-finding, let us admit, too, that the man in Byron is in many respects as unsatisfactory as the poet. And, putting aside all direct moral criticism of him,—with which we need not concern ourselves here,—we shall find that he is unsatisfactory in the same way. Some of Byron's most crying faults as a man,—his vulgarity, his affectation,—are really akin to the faults of commonness, of want of art, in his workmanship as a poet. The ideal nature for the poet and artist is that of the finely touched and finely gifted man, the......of the Greeks ; now, Byron's nature was in substance not that of the......at all, but rather, as I have said, of the barbarian. The want of fine perception which made it possible for him to formulate either the comparison between himself and Rousseau, or his reason for getting Lord Delawarr excused from a "licking " at Harrow, is exactly what made possible for him also his terrible dealings in *An ye wool* ; *I have redde thee* ; *Sunburn me* ; *Oons, and it is excellent well.* It is exactly, again, what made possible for him his precious dictum that Pope is a Greek temple, and a string of other criticisms of the like force ; it is exactly, in fine, what deteriorated the quality of his poetic production. If we think of a good representative of that finely touched and exquisitely gifted nature which is the ideal nature for the poet and artist,—if we think of Raphael, for instance, who truly is......just as Byron is not,—we shall bring into clearer light the connection in Byron between the faults of the man and the faults of the poet. With Raphael's character Byron's sins of vulgarity and false

criticism would have been impossible, just as with Raphael's art Byron's sins of common and bad workmanship

Yes, all this is true, but it is not the whole truth about Byron nevertheless ; very far from it. The severe criticism of M. Scherer by no means gives us the whole truth about Byron, and we have not yet got it in what has been added to that criticism here. The negative part of the true criticism of him we perhaps have ; the positive part, by far more important, we have not. Byron's admirers appeal eagerly to foreign testimonies in his favour. Some of these testimonies do not much move me ; but one testimony there is among them which will always carry, with me at any rate, great weight,—the testimony of Goethe. Goethe's sayings about Byron were uttered, it must, however, be remembered, at the height of Byron's vogue, when that puissant and splendid personality was exercising its full power of attraction. In Goethe's own household there was an atmosphere of glowing Byron-worship ; his daughter-in-law was a passionate admirer of Byron, nay, she enjoyed and prized his poetry, as did Tieck and so many others in Germany at that time, much above the poetry of Goethe himself. Instead of being irritated and rendered jealous by this, a nature like Goethe's was inevitably led by it to heighten, not lower, the note of his praise. The Time-Spirit, or *Zeit-Geist*, he would himself have said, was working just then for Byron. This working of the *Zeit-Geist* in his favour was an advantage added to Byron's other advantages, an advantage of which he had a right to get the benefit. This is what Goethe would have thought and said to himself ; and so he would have been led even to heighten somewhat his estimate of Byron, and to accentuate the emphasis of praise. Goethe speaking of Byron at that moment was not and could not be quite the same cool critic as Goethe speaking of Dante, or Moliere, or Milton. This, I say, we ought to remember in reading Goethe's judgments on Byron and his poetry. Still, if we are careful to bear this in mind, and if we quote Goethe's praise correctly,—which is not always done by those who in this country quote it,—and we add to it that great and due qualification added to

it by Goethe himself,—which so far as I have seen has never yet been done by his quoters in this country at all,— then we shall have a judgment on Byron, which comes, I think, very near the truth, and which may well command our adherence.

In his judicious and interesting *Life of Byron*. Professor Nichol quotes Goethe as saying that Byron "is undoubtedly to be regarded as the greatest genius of our century." What Goethe did really say was "the greatest *talent*," not "the greatest *genius*." The difference is important, because, while talent gives the notion of power in a man's performance, genius gives rather the notion of felicity and perfection in it; and this divine gift of consummate felicity by no means, as we have seen, belongs to Byron and to his poetry. Goethe said that Byron "must unquestionably be regarded as the greatest talent of the century." He said of him, moreover: "The English may think of Byron what they please, but it is certain that they can point to no poet who is his like. He is different from all the rest, and in the main greater." Here, again, Professor Nichol translates: "They can show no (living) poet who is to be compared to him;"—inserting the word *living*, I suppose, to prevent its being thought that Goethe would have ranked Byron, as a poet, above Shakespeare and Milton. But Goethe did not use, or, I think, mean to imply, any limitation such as is added by Professor Nichol. Goethe said simply, and simply, and he meant to say, "*no* poet." Only the words which follow ought not, I think, to be rendered, "who is to be compared to him," that is to say, "*who is his equal as a poet*." They mean rather, "who may properly be compared with him," *who is his parallel*." And when Goethe said that Byron was "in the main greater" than all the rest of the English poets, he was not so much thinking of the strict rank, as poetry, of Byron's production; he was thinking of that wonderful personality of Byron which so enters into his poetry, and which Goethe called " a personality such, for its eminence, as has never been yet, and such as is not likely to come again." He was thinking of that "daring, dash, and grandiosity," of Byron, which are indeed so splendid; and which were, so

Goethe maintained, of a character to do good, because "everything great is formative," and what is thus formative does us good.

The faults which went with this greatness, and which impaired Byron's poetical work, Goethe saw very well. He saw the constant state of warfare and combat, the "negative and polemical working," which makes Byron's poetry a poetry in which we can so little find rest; he saw the *Hang zum Unbegrenzten*, the straining after the unlimited, which made it impossible for Byron to produce poetic wholes such as the *Tempest* or *Lear*; he saw the *zu viel Empirie* the promiscuous adoption of all the matter offered to the poet by life, just as it was offered, without thought or patience for the mysterious transmutation to be operated on this matter by poetic form. But in a sentence which I cannot, as I say, remember to have yet seen quoted in any English criticism of Byron, Goethe lays his finger on the cause of all these defects in Byron, and on his real course of weakness both as a man and as a poet. "The moment he reflects, he is a child," says Goethe; *'sobald er reflectirt, ist er ein kind.*"

Now if we take the two parts of Goethe's criticism of Byron, the favourable and the unfavourable, and put them together, we shall have, I think, the truth. On the one hand, a splendid and puissant personality—a personality "in eminence such as has never been yet, and is not likely to come again"; of which the like, therefore, is not to be found among the poets of our nation, by which Byron "is different from all the rest, and in the main greater." Byron is, moreover, "the greatest talent of our century." On the other hand, the splendid personality and unmatched talent, this unique Byron, "is quite too much in the dark about himself"; nay, "the moment he begins to reflect, he is a child." There we have, I think, Byron complete; and estimating him and ranking him we have to strike a balance between the gain which accrues to his poetry, as compared with the productions of other poets, from his superiority, and the loss which accrues to it from his defects.

A balance of this kind has to be struck in the case of all poets except the few supreme masters in whom a profound criticism of life exhibits itself indissoluble connection with the laws of poetic truth and beauty. I have seen it said that I allege poetry to have for its characteristic this : that it is a criticism of life ; and that I make it to be thereby distinguished from prose, which is something else. So far from it, that when I first used this expression, *a criticism of life*, now many years ago, it was to literature in general that I applied it, and not to poetry in especial, "The end and aim of all literature," I said, "is, if one considers it attentively, nothing but that : *a criticism of life*." And so it surely is ; the main end and aim of all our utterance, whether in prose or in verse, is surely a criticism of life. We are not brought much on our way, I admit, towards an adequate definition of poetry as distinguished from prose by that truth ; still a truth it is, and poetry can never prosper if it is forgotten. In poetry, however, the criticism of life has to be made conformably to the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. Truth and seriousness of substance and matter, felicity and perfection of manner, as these are exhibited in the best poets, are diction and what constitute a criticism of life made in conformity with the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty; and it is by knowing and feeling the work of those poets, that we learn to recognise the fulfilment and non-fulfilment of such conditions.

The moment, however, that we leave the small band of the very best poets, the true classics, and deal with poets of the next rank, we shall find that perfect truth and seriousness of matter, in close alliance with perfect truth and felicity of manner, is the rule no longer. We have now to take what we can get, to forego something here, to admit compensation for it there; to strike a balance, and to see how our poets stand in respect to one another when that balance has been struck. Let us observe how this is so.

We will take three poets, among the most considerable of our century : Leopardi, Byron, Wordsworth. Giacomo Leopardi was ten years younger than Byron, and he died

thirteen years after him; both of them, thus, died young —Byron at the age of thirty-six, Leopardi at the age of thirty-nine. Both of them were of noble birth, both of them suffered from physical defect, both of them were in revolt against the established facts and beliefs of their age; but here the likeness between them ends. The stricken poet of Recanati had no country, for an Italy in his day did not exist; he had no audience, no celebrity. The volume of his poems, published in the very year of Byron's death, hardly sold, I suppose, its tens, while volumes of Byron's poetry were selling their tens of thousands. And yet Leopardi has the very qualities which we have found wanting in Byron; he has the sense, form and style, the passion for just expression, the sure and firm touch of the true artist. Nay, more, he has a grave fulness of knowledge, an insight into the real bearings of the questions which as a sceptical poet he raises, a power of seizing the real point, a lucidity, with which the author of *Cain* has nothing to compare. I can hardly imagine Leopardi reading—

> " . . . And *thou* would'st go on aspiring
> To the great double Mysteries ! the *two Principles* !"

or following Byron in his theological controversy with Dr. Kennedy, without having his features overspread by a calm and fine smile, and remarking of his brilliant contemporary, as Goethe did, that "the moment he begins to reflect, he is a child." But indeed whoever wishes to feel the full superiority of Leopardi over Byron in philosophic thought, and in the expression of it, has only to read one paragraph of one poem, the paragraph of *La Ginestra*, beginning

> "Sovente in queste piage,"

and ending

> "Non so se il riso o la pieta prevale."

In like manner, Leopardi is at many points the poetic superior of Wordsworth too. He has a far wider culture than Wordsworth, more mental lucidity, more freedom from illusions as to the real character of the established

fact and of reigning conventions ; above all, this Italian, with his pure and sure touch, with the fineness of perception, is far more of the artist. Such a piece of pompous dulness as

"O for the coming of that glorious time,"

and all the rest of it, or such lumbering verse as Mr. Ruskin's enemy,

"Parching summer hath no warrant"—

would have been as impossible to Leopardi as to Dante. Where, then, is Wordsworth's superiority? for the worth of what he has given us in poetry I hold to be greater, on the whole, than the worth of what Leopardi has given us. It is in Wordsworth's sound and profound sense

"Of joy in widest commonalty spread" :

whereas Leopardi remains with his thoughts ever fixed upon the *essenza insanabile*, upon the *acerbo indegno mistero delle cose*. It is in the power with which Wordsworth feels the resources of joy offered to us in the primary human affections and duties, and in the power with which, in his moments of inspiration, he renders this joy, and makes us, too, feel it ; a force greater than himself seeming to lift him and to prompt his tongue, so that he speaks in a style far above any style of which he has the constant command, and with a truth far beyond any philosophic truth of which he has the conscious and assured possession. Neither Leopardi nor Wordsworth are of the same order with the great poets who made such verse as

or as

"In la sua volontade e nostra pace" ;

or as

"...Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither ;
Ripeness is all."

But as compared with Leopardi, Wordsworth, though at many points less lucid though far less a master of style, far less of an artist, gains so much by his criticism of life being, in certain matters of profound importance, healthful and true, whereas Leopardi's pessimism is not, that the value of Wordsworth's poetry, on the whole, stands higher for us than that of Leopardi's, as it stands higher for us, I think, than that of any modern poetry except Goethe's.

Byron's poetic value is also greater, on the whole, than Leopardi's ; and his superiority turns in the same way upon the surpassing worth of something which he had and was, after all deduction has been made for his shortcomings. We talk of Byron's *personality*, "a personality in eminence such as has never been yet, and is not likely to come again" ; and we say that by this personality Byron is "different from all the rest of English poets, and in the main greater." But can we not be a little more circumstantial, and name that in which the wonderful power of this personality consisted ? We can ; with the instinct of a poet Mr. Swinburne has seized upon it and named it for us. The power of Byron's personality lies in "the splendid and imperishable excellence which covers all his offences and outweighs all his defects : *the excellence of sincerity and strength.*"

Byron found our nation, after its long and victorious struggle with revolutionary France, fixed in a system of established facts and dominant ideas which revolted him. The mental bondage of the most powerful part of our nation, of its strong middle class, to a narrow and false system of this kind, is what we call British Philistinism. That bondage is unbroken to this hour, but in Byron's time it was even far more deep and dark than it is now. Byron was an aristocrat, and it is not difficult for an aristocrat to look on the prejudices and habits of the British Philistine with scepticism and disdain. Plenty of young men of his own class Byron met at Almack's or at Lady Jersey's, who regarded the established facts and reigning beliefs of the England of that day with as little reverence as he did. But these men, disbelievers in British Philistinism in private, entered English public life, the most conventional in the

world, and at once they saluted with respect the habits and ideas of British Philistinism as if they were a part of the order of creation, and as if in public no sane man would think of warring against them. With Byron it was different. What he called the *cant* of the great middle part of the English nation, what we call its Philistinism, revolted him; but the cant of his own class, deferring to this Philistinism and profiting by it, while they disbelieved in it, revolted him even more. "Come what may," are his own words, "I will never flatter the million's canting in any shape." His class in general, on the other hand, shrugged their shoulders at this cant, laughed at it, pandered to it, and ruled by it. The falsehood, cynicism, insolence, misgovernment, oppression, with their consequent unifailing crop of human misery, which were produced by this state of things, roused Byron to irreconcilable revolt and battle.They made him indignant; they infuriated him; they were so strong, defiant so maleficent, —and yet he felt that they were doomed. "You have seen every trampler down in turn," he comforts himself with saying, "from Buonaparte to the simplest individuall." The old order, as after 1815 it stood victorious, with its ignorance and misery below, its cant, selfishness, and cynicism above, was at home and abroad equally hateful to him. "I have simplified my politics," he writes, "into an utter detestation of all existing government." And again : "Give me a republic. The king-times are fast finishing ; there will be bloodshed like water and tears like mist, but the peoples will conquer in the end. I shall not live to see it, but I foresee it."

Byron himself gave the preference, he tells us, to politicians and doers, far above writers and singers. But the politics of his own day and of his own class,—even of the Liberals of his own class,—were impossible for him. Nature had not formed him for a Liberal peer, proper to move the Address in the House of Lords, to pay compliments to the energy and self-reliance of British middle-class Liberalism, and to adapt his politics to suit it. Unfitted for such poltics, he threw himself upon poetry as his organ ; and in poetry his topics were not Queen Mab, and the Witch of Atlas, and the Sensitive Plant—they were the upholders

of the old order, George the Third and Lord Castlereagh and the Duke of Wellington and Southey, and they were the Canters and tramplers of the great world, and they were his enemies and himself.

Such was Byron's personality, by which "he is different from all the rest of English poets, and in the main greater." But he posed all his life, say M. Scherer. Let us distinguish. There is the Byron who posed, there is the Byron with his affectations and silliness, the Byron whose weakness Lady Blessington, with a woman's acuteness, so admirably seized: "His great defect is flippancy and a total want of self-possession." But when this theatrical and easily criticised personage betook himself to poetry, and when he had fairly warmed his work, theh he became another man ; then the theatrical personage passed away; then a higher power took possession of him and filled him then at last came forth into light that true and puissant personality, with its direct strokes, its ever-welling force, its satire, its energy, and its agony. This is the real Byron : whoever stops at the theatrical preludings does not know him. And this real Byron may will be superior to the stricken Leopardi, he may will be declared "different from all the rest of English poets, and in the main greater," in so far as it is true of him as M. Taine well says, that "all other soul, in comparison with his, seem inert"; in so far as it is true of him that with superb, exhaustless energy, he maintained, as Professor Nichol well says, "the struggle that keeps alive, if it does not save, the soul" ; in so far, finally, as he deserves (and he does deserve) the noble praise of him which I have already quoted from Mr. Swinburne ; the praise for " the splendid and imperishable excellence which covers all his offences and outweighs all his defects : *the excellence of sincerity and strength.*"

True, as a man, Byron could not manage himself, could not guide his ways aright, but was all astray. True, he has no light, cannot lead us from the past to the future ; " the moment he reflects, he is a child." The way out of the false state of things which enraged him he did not see,—the slow and laborious way upward ; he had not the patience,

knowledge, self-discipline, virtue, requisite for seeing it. True, also, as a poet, he has no fine and exact sense for word and structure and rhythm ; he has not the artist's nature and gifts. Yet a personality of Byron's force counts for so much in life, and a rhetorician of Byron's force counts for so much in literature ! But it would be most unjust to label Byron, as M. Scherer is disposed to label him, as a rhetorician only. Along with his astounding power and passion he had a strong and deep sense for what is beautiful in nature, and for what is beautiful in human action and suffering. When he warms to his work, when he is inspired, Nature herself seems to take the pen from him as she took it from Wordsworth, and to write for him as she wrote for Wordsworth, though in a different fashion, with her own penetrating simplicity. Goethe has well observed of Byron, that when he is at his happiest his representation of things is as easy and real as if he were improvising. It is so ; and his verse then exhibits quite another and a higher quality from the rhetorical quality,—admirable as this also in its own kind of merit is,—of such verse as

> "Minions of splendour shrinking from distress,"

and of so much more verse of Byron's of that stamp. Nature, I say, takes the pen for him ; and then, assured master of a true poetic style though he is not, any more than Wordsworth, yet as from Wordsworth at his best there will come such verse as

> "Will no one tell me what she sings ?";

so from Byron, too, at his best, there will come such verse as

> "He heard it, but he heeded not ; his eyes
> Were with his heart, and that was far away."

Of verse of this high quality, Byron has much ; of verse of a quality lower than this, of a quality rather rhetorical than truly poetic, yet still of extraordinary power and merit, he has still more. To separate, from the mass of poetry which Byron poured forth, all this higher portion, so superior to the mass, and still so considerable in quantity, and to present it in one body by itself, is to do a service, I believe, to

Byron's reputation, and to the poetic glory of our country.

Such a service I have in the present volume attempted to perform. To Byron, after all the tributes which have been paid to him, here is yet one tribute more—

"Among thy mightier offerings here are mine!"

not a tribute of boundless homage certainly, but sincere; a tribute which consists not in covering the poet with eloquent eulogy of our own but in letting him, at his best and greatest, speak for himself. Surely the critic who does most for his author is the critic who gains readers for his author himself, not for any lucubrations on his author;—gains more readers for him, and enables those readers to read him with more admiration.

And in spite of his prodigious vogue, Byron has never yet, perhaps, had the serious admiration which he deserves. Society read him and talked about him, as it reads and talks *Endymion* to-day; and with the same sort result. It looked in Byron's glass as it looks in Lord Beaconsfield's, and sees, or fancies that it sees, its own face there; and then it goes its way, and straightway forgets what manner of man it saw. Even of his passionate admirers, how many never got beyond the theatrical Byron, from whom they caught the fashion of deranging their hair, or of knotting their neck-handkerchief, or of leaving their shirt-collar unbuttoned; how few profoundly felt his vital influence, the influence of his splendid and imperishable excellence of sincerity and strength!

His own aristocratic class, whose cynical make-believe drove him to fury; the great middle-class, on whose impregnable Philistinism he shattered himself to pieces,—how little have either of these felt Byron's vital influence! As the inevitable break-up of the old order comes, as the English middle-class slowly awakens from its intellectual sleep of two centuries, as our actual present world, to which this sleep has condemned us, shows itself more clearly,—our world of an aristocracy materialised and null, a middle-class purblind and hideous, a lower class crude and brutal,—we shall turn our eyes again, and to more purpose, upon this passionate

and dauntless soldier of a forlorn hope, who, ignorant of the future and unconsoled by its promises, nevertheless waged against the conservation of the old impossible world so fiery battle ; waged it till he fell,—waged it with such splendid and imperishable excellence of sincerity and strength.

Wordsworth's value is of another kind. Wordsworth has an insight into permanent sources of joy and consolation for mankind which Byron has not ; his poetry gives us more which we may rest upon than Byron's,—more which we can rest upon now, and which men may rest upon always. I place Wordsworth's poetry, therefore, above Byron's on the whole, although in some points he was greatly Byron's inferior, and although Byron's poetry will always, probably, find more readers than Wordsworth's, and will give pleasure more easily. But these two, Wordsworth and Byron, stand, it seems to me, first and pre-eminent in actual performance, a glorious pair, among the English poets of this century. Keats had probably, indeed, a more consummate poetic gift than either of them ; but he died having produced too little and being as yet too immature to rival them. I for my part can never even think of equalling with them any other of their contemporaries ;—either Coleridge, poet and philosopher wrecked in a mist of opium ; or Shelley, beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain. Wordsworth and Byron stand out by themselves. When the year 1900 is turned, and our nation comes to recount her poetic glories in the century which has then just ended, the first names with her will be these.

———

BYRON

(*Critical Analysis and Exposition*)

Arnold thinks that Byron, like Wordsworth, will show better in a judicious selection. Both are outstanding poets of the century. Shelley, except in snatches and fragments, cannot be compared with either. Scott never rises to the level of incurable want of a sound subject-matter—and he curiously believes that Shelley will live more in his Essays and Letters than in his poetry.

Byron as a Poet

Arnold agrees with Swinburne when he says that Byron rarely wrote anything either worthless or faultless, but does not believe as Swinburne says, that Byron can only be judged or appreciated in the mass. Byron has written much, but all his poetry is not of uniform excellence. He himself confesses that none has done more through negligence to corrupt the language. Arnold thinks that the faults of his poetry are those of neglignce and not of labour. Byron lacks the discipline of an artist. He wrote just to relieve himself, and in such a case we can hardly look for organic unity in his poetry. But he has a wonderful power of vividly conceiving a single incident, single situation—and of visualizing it so that it grips our imagination. Compare the journey and death of Hasan in *Giaour* or the disposal of the slain Ezzelin's body in *Lara*.

Byron once had an immense vogue. Now there is a reaction. The French critic, Taine, praises Byron very highly. Scott is so infatuated that he compares Byron with Shakespeare in variety and with Milton in sublimity, and compliments him on managing his pen with the careless and

negligent ease of a man of quality, Edmond Scherer voices the reaction when he says that Byron has treated hardly any subject but one—himself. Arnold points out Byron never comes near Shakespeare's or Milton's felicity in diction and movement. As a man, Byron has the faults of vulgarity and affectation; as a poet he suffers for want of art and discipline.

Goethe's judgment upon Byron

Nichol quotes Goethe as saying that Byron "is undoubtedly to be regarded as the greatest genius of our century." According to Arnold, Goethe must have meant the greatest talent. Arnold thinks that Goethe refers to the wonderful personality of Byron when he says that Byron was in the main greater than all the rest of English poets. Goethe as easily spots out the defects of Byron's poetry—the spirit of negation, the straining after the unlimited and the indiscriminate use of his experience, however crude it may be. Goethe further remarks that the moment he reflects, he is a child.

Let us now note the chief point in Goethe's criticism. First, Byron has a splendid and puissant personality which seems to distinguish him from the rest of English poets, and makes him in the main greater. Secondly, he is the greatest talent of the century. Thirdly, the moment he reflects, he is a child. Next to apply to him the test that poetry is a criticism of life. This dictum simply means truth and seriousness of substance and matter, felicity and perfection of diction and manner. Arnold compares Byron with the Italian poet, Leopardi. Both were of noble birth, struggled against a physical defect, and reacted against the belief and traditions of the age. But Byron enjoyed great popularity in his time, while Leopardi lived in obscurity. Yet Leopardi has the fine and gifted soul of an artist—both a sense for style and insight into the meaning of life, a sceptical poet as he is. When Byron attempts philosophic thought, he is a dismal failure. When Leopardi is compared with Wordsworth, his superiority appears in his culture, in his mental lucidity, in his freedom from illusions and his artistic instinct and delicate perception, but Leopardi is a poet of

negation and pessimism while Wordsworth is a poet of joy in the widest commonalty spread. If Wordsworth is less an artist than Leopardi, he is superior in his criticism of life. Swinburne pays Byron a tribute for excellence of sincerity and strength. Byron's greatness lies in his eminent personality, which was up in arms against the prejudices and habits of the British Philistine, the cant and hypocrisy of the age.

Scherer says that Byron posed all his life. But we ought to distinguish between the Byron that poses and the real Byron. The real Byron reveals himself in the genuine, and not the feigned passages of his poetry, lit up with flashes of satirical wit and swept by passionate energy. The real Byron is superior to Leopardi. Byron's life was erratic, but his personality which defied fate and death, counts for much in any age. He is not simply a rhetorician, as Scherer says. He has a passionate love of the beautiful in nature, and of the beautiful in human action and suffering. In his inspired moments he has a direct vision of things, and writes with force, sincerity and felicity. Byron has not wordworth's insight into permanent sources of joy and consolation for mankind —Wordsworth's healthier and robuster criticism of life, nor Keats consummate gift of phrasing and imagery. But Byron is certainly a more popular poet than either. He has, as Goethe puts it, daring dash and grandiosity.

NOTES

Paragraph 1. They **both.........exhibited**—Wordsworth and Byron would be more fairly represented by a selection made of their poetry than by the total mass of their production. **Scott...all**—Scott ranks below Byron and Wordsworth. **On the other hand......increased**—Scott is not a high-grade poet, but there is uniformity in his poetry—he never rises high nor sinks below ; therefore, there can be little use in making a selection of his poetry. **But for my own part.........Wordsworth**—As Arnold thinks, Shelley cannot be matched with Wordsworth and Byron in his poetic gifts except in a few instances. Stopford Brooke has made a selection of Shelley's poetry, but it cannot have the same value as a selection of Wordsworth or Byron.

Paragraph 2. **He is a beautiful..................Byron**—As a man, Shelley deserves more admiration than Byron; Shelley has a charm and fascination that are irresistible. **But all the personal charm......unsubstantiality**—Shelley has the irresistible personal charm, but his poetry, as Arnold thinks, suffers from a defect of subject-matter, isand wanting in substance. **His translations**—his translations of Calderon, Eurpides, Goethe, Plato. **Nay, I doubt......Poetry**—Arnold says that Shelley's essays and letters will stand the test of time better than his poetry. His prediction has been falsified. Shelley's poetry is read more than his Essays and Letters.

Paragraph 3. **It is quite true..............estimate**—Arnold agrees with Swinburne that Byron rarely wrote anything either worthless or faultless—and it means that there is always some substance in what he writes, and that his poetry is not free from faults. While Arnold objects that Byron can be appreciated in the mass, he says the volume of Byron's poetry should be taken into consideration in estimating his greatness. **There are portions......other**—the quality of Byron's poetry varies; it is not of uniform character. **Is......Passages**—has no organic unity.

Paragraph 4. **Nor could Byron...self command**—Byron took not time and thought in writing verses; it was done off-hand and at odd moments. Hedid not wait for inspiration to break in upon him. It means that Byron was not one to submit to artistic discipline and as such it happens that his work lacks unity. **He wrote.......indispensable**—Did he write in response to some urge within him or because he wanted to get rid of his *ennui?* It is not clear what he meant by saying that he wrote to relieve himself. **But it was...press**—Arnold describes here the way Byron composed verses. He threw them off in a moment of heat (that would be equivalent to inspiration), adding new passages as they might occur to him later, and even when they were being printed. The results would necessarily be disunity. **Oedipus**—by Sophocles.

Paragraph 5. **But he........feel it too**—Byron visualizes a single incident, single situation, and seems to have a firm grip of it so that the reader too is carried away by the force

and vividness of his description. **Our total.....indistinctness**—The *Giaour*, as Byron himself confesses, is a string of passages and when we go through it, the impression of the total is lost. **But the incidents...powerful**—the story of the Giaour is told piecemeal and in fragments, at first by a Turkish fisherman, who witnessed some of the events and finally by the Giaour himself in his confession to a monk. *Giaour* is a term of contempt applied among the Mohammedans to a Christian. In Byron's poems Leilah, the beautiful concubine, falls in love with a Giaour, and flees from the seraglio, is overtaken, put to death and cast into the sea. **Lara**—A sequel to *The Corsair* by Byron. The hero is Conrad, chief of the pirates, afterwards known as Lara in the poem of that title which relates his last adventures. He enters the palaces of Sultan Syed in the disguise of a dervish, but is discovered and thrown into a dungeon. Gulnare, queen of the harem, places him and follows him from the palace, disguised as a page. Upon returning to the Pirate Isle, he finds that Medora, his true love, had died during his absence; so he returns to his native land, heads a rebellion and is shot. On his page, Kaled, is discovered to be Gulnare in disguise. **Ezzelin's body**—Sir Ezzeline was the gentleman who recognized Lara at the table of Lord Otho, and charged him with being Conrad, the corsair. **And in the same way...wholes**—The fact is that Byron is not a good story-teller in verse. The stories are ill-jointed but Byron's merit lies in his vivid descriptions of incidents and characters.

Paragraph 6. **To the poetry.....received**—On the Continent Byron was admired next to Shakespeare. It was Goethe who established the Byron-cult in Europe. **With all....head**—compare :

Sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head—*Hamlet*

In spite of repteitions—**Byron** has one character—himself who appears again and again. **Nevertheless...him**—Byron's popularity is now on the decline. **We shall......were**—we cannot let ourselves be blind to the faults of Byron as his contemporaries were. **The mere interval......inevitable**—Some time has elapsed since the decline of Byron's popularity, and it is now time for his correct assessment—and there can be no illusions left about Byron. **This....is answer**—How does Byron stand when he is released of the baggage of his inferior poetry? Arnold has witnessed the surging popularity of Byron and its later decline, and he has little illusions about him from the beginning. Arnold is there, in a position to estimate correctly the merit of his poetry when it is disencumbered of inferior stuff.

Paragraph 7. **Byron........superstitions**—Byron has been made too much of in France—he has been eulogized and idolized.

Paragraph 8. **He pay.........worship**—*i.e.,* Byron is now neglected while he was the vogue in the past. **Atteint a la cime**—attains the summit. **In Byron......all**—Byron is incapable of depersonalizing his self, and, therefore, cannot reach the region of true art. **Fecundity**—productivity. **These qualities...limits**—they are circumscribed by his personality, and it is again his sham personality that is exploited by him in his poetry. **He posed......long**—he seemed to be playing a part all his life ; he never dealt with every phase of human life from the lightest to the gravest.

Paragraph 9. *Cain*—Byron's dramatic poem. *Cain* is based largely on the Biblical narrative. Cain's wife he calls Adah, and Abel's wife he calls Zillah. **While managing... quality**—Scott means that Byron wrote without effort and strain, that spontaneity is a quality of his verse. **One has ......difference**—Milton is incapable of writing such excerable a bad verse as Byron does.

Paragraph 10. **Leopardi**—(1798-1837), Italian Poet. At sixteen he had read all the Latin and Greek classics; could write with accuracy French, Spanish, English and Hebrew, and wrote a commentary on Polinus. Pessimism is the genuine expression of his deepest nature and reasoned conviction. **Byron is so negligent......quality**—Byron had too impetuous

a nature to attend to the niceties of art. Artistic predilection must have been alien to him. It is not surprising if he sometimes writes intolerable verse. He has no sense of words ; he has no artistic instinct. In the matter of words, therefore, as Arnold says, he betrays the indifference of a barbarian. What Scott says of him, is right in a sense. It is not with commendable ease and naturalness that Byron writes verse. **Solecism**—mistake in the use of words or in the structure of a sentence. **Anacolouthon**—want of a sequence in a sentence. **In the dark...... time**—from Shakespeare's *Sonnet* cxii. **Presenting...... Troy divine**—from Milton's *Il Penseroso*. **His vulgarity ......poet**—Arnold ascribes Byron's vulgarity and posing to his lack of the artistic instinct. **Euphyes**—graceful, goodly. **Lord Delawarr**—Byron's fellow student and cousin. **Licking**—punishment. **Pope......temple**—Byron admired highly his verse. **Raphael**—(1483-1520), the great Italian painter.

Paragraph 11. The **negative part.........not**—Scherer criticizes Byron on the negative side ; there is a positive side to Byron, which needs to be stressed, and then his greatness will emerge. **Byron's admirers......favour**—Byron has been highly praised abroad, but we cannot look for the true estimate of his genius in this exaggerated praise. **When......attraction**—Goethe was attracted to Byron by his tremendous personality, but he was at the same time aware of his blemishes. **In Goethe's own household......... himself**—Goethe in fact established the Byron cult in Europe. He admired Byron and his poetry of course discriminatingly : his daughter-in-law was ravingly fond of Byron's poetry ; in Germany some, including Tieck, admired Byron above Goethe. **Tieck**—(1773-1853), he holds an honourable place among Germany's dramatic and literary critics. **The Time-Spirit......Byron**—Byron was so much in the vogue then because he interpreted the spirit of the time so accurately. **Goethe......Milton**—Arnold thinks that Goethe just yielded to the Time-Spirit in his praise of Byron, and that there is necessarily an element of exaggeration in it. Goethe could not have been as sane in praising Byron as in praising Dante, Moliere, or Milton. **Due qualification......himself**—*i.e.*, the shortcomings of Byron,

which Goethe points out while he praises him highly.

Paragraph 12. **The difference......poetry**—Arnold substitutes *talent* for *genius* when Goethe speaks of Byron as the greatest genius of the age. It marks an important difference. Talent implies power and skill in one's performance, but genius connotes sometimes greater and finer, and it is the perfection of loveliness—artistic maturity, and consummation. And Byron lacks this artistic maturity. **And when Goethe......again**—Goethe praises Byron discriminatingly; as Arnold points out here. When Goethe says that Byron is different from all the rest of English poets, and in the main greater, he is not thinking so much of his poetry as of his personality. And his a personality that sums up the age, and is to be rarely met with. **Daring, dash, and grandiosity**—Goethe admires Byron for his boldness, spirit of defiance and capacity for big things.

Paragraph 13. **Constant state......combat**—the poetry of revolt and destructive passion which Byron wrote. **Negative......working**—no philosophy of his own, nothing constructive in place of his conventionalities he denounced. **In which......rest**—which fails to sustain our spirit. **Hang zum Unbegrebsten**—propensity to the unlimited. **Zu viel Empirie**—too much empiricism indiscriminate and wholesale adoption of his experience. **Mysterious transmutation......from**—*i.e.*, striking change wrought by selection of details that are essential or contributory to the artistic effect, by suppression of details that are non-essential or accidental, and by proper and effective arrangement of the material. *N.B.* The artist works within the limits. He must preserve a due balance between parts, and subordinate them to the effect of the whole. But Byron worked the other way. In him every distinct part, whether it is a burst of imagination or sentiment, or a hasty description, tends to outgrow its limits, and expands to an indefinite volume, without any reference to its relation to the whole. **The moment......child**—*i.e.*, Byron is carried away by each current of emotion or stream of vision, which he cannot control.

Paragraph 14. **Now if we......truth**—by combining the negative and positive parts of Goethe's criticism we shall arrive at the true measure of Byron. Byron's is the personality rarely to be met, with and distinguishing him from the rest of English poets he is the greatest talent of century, but he is too much in the dark about himself (*i.e.* incapable of self-analysis or self-examination), and the moment he begins to reflect, he is a child. In the light of this analysis we have to see how he gains or loses as a poet.

Paragraph 15. **A balance......beauty**—Except the few whose criticism of life achieves poetic truth and beauty, putting them in the first rank, we have to judge other poets in reference to what they have been able to accomplish and have failed in. The shortcomings have to be set against their excellences. **We are......truth**—Poetry is a criticism of life, literature is a criticism of life, and then we do not see how poetry is to be distinguished from prose. But Arnold points out that poetry is a criticism of life, under conditions fixed by poetic truth and poetic beauty. Poetic truth will mean truth and seriousness of matter, and poetic beauty will mean adequacy and felicity of expression. The two are combined in the best poets.

Paragraph 16. **We have now to take......struck**—In dealing with poets other than those of the first rank we have to take into consideration both his excellences and shortcomings and see how they can be weighed against each other and so a common measure can be arrived at, and sometimes necessary to compare them with other poets.

Paragraph 17. **Were......age**—*i.e.*, fought against the conventions, moral cant and hypocrisy of the age. **The stricken poet**—Leopardi was a confirmed invalid. **For an Italy......exist**—no united Italy then existed. The movement for a united Italy began in the nineteenth century. **The year of Byron's death**—1824. **He has the sense......artist**—Leopardi's poetry was hardly appreciated in his day, while there was a craze for Byron's poetry. But unlike Byron, he had the delicate sensibilities and exquisite craftsmanship of a true artist. **Nay, more...compare**—Leopardi has again profounder knowledge of life, a fuller understanding of the

issues he poses as a doubting poet, clarity of exposition, and in these respects Byron stands no comparison with him. **Theological......Dr. Kennedy**—Conversation of Religion with Lord Byron. **La Ginestra**—Thoughts on human destiny, suggested by the sight of Vesuvius and the memory of Pompeii and Herculaneum, buried under ashes and mud. **Sovente......piagge**—Frequently in that calamity. **Non so se ...prevale**—I do not know to myself (whether) laughter or pity prevails.

Paragraph 18. **He has a far...artist**—Leopardi is superior to Wordsworth in some respects. He has a broader culture, greater mental clarity, more critical and analytical insight into the beliefs and conventions of the age (with the result that they were debunked) than Wordsworth. In other words, Leopardi with his unfailing sense of beauty of expression, with his fine sensibilities, was a much greater artist than Wordsworth. But Wordsworth is superior to Leopardi because of his perception of joy in widest commonalty spread. **Essenza insanbile**—imperishable essence. **Acerbo......delle cose**—the bitter, shameful mystery of the cause. **It is in the power...possession**—Wordsworth's superiority to Leopardi lies in this : he perceives and makes available to us the joy, springidg from Nature and from primary human feelings and sentiments and duties, and this sense of abiding joy is conveyed to us in starkly plain and arresting expression, which seems to be dictated by Nature herself, when he is inspired; it is of course in rare moments that this felicity and perfection of language are combined with the truth of substance, and it is a style which is achieved by his self-effacement when he is possessed by the strength of his unique experience. The Greek verse quoted means—Men must endure the wrath of Fate. **But as compared......Goethe's**—Wordsworth has neither Leopardi's mental clarity nor his exquisite sense of style—in fact Wordsworth is far less of an artist than Leopardi. But Wordsworth excels Leopardi in his criticism of life. His is a positive criticism of life while Leopardi's pessimism is a negative criticism of life—and it leads nowhere. Wordsworth's poetry has a higher value than Leopardi's. He stands above the contemporary poets except Goethe.

Paragraph 19. **Circumstantial**—specific. **The power…… …strength**—Byron might have posed and attitudinized all his life, but the sincerity of rage and vehemence of strength with which he attacked the conventional morality, the cant and hypocrisy of his age, are genuine expression of his puissant and splendid personality.

Paragraph 20. **Fixed…him**—ruled by rigid conventionality and hypocritical morality which disgusted Byron. **British Philistinism**—middle class resistance to ideas: narrow, parochial outlook ; cant and hypocrisy in matters of religion and morality ; false respectability and regard for social conventions, etc. **That bondage…now**—Philistinism still rules strong in the middle class, but in Byron's day it was a much greater force. **Almack's**—Almack's Rooms, opened at No. 20, King Street in 1765 by a Scotchman named MacCall, were long famous for their exclusive assemblies and balls, managed by a committee of ladies of rank, admission to which conferred the cachet of fashion. **Lady Jersey's** name is heard of in connection with the introduction of Quadrille into London in 1815. **But these men…them**—The aristocratic young men of Byron's day did not believe in middle class philistinism, but lent support to it by their conformity to social conventions, and could never think of denouncing them (which Byron alone did). **Cant**—practice of hypocrisy in matters of religion and morality. **Shrugged……it**—paid no serious attention to the middle class cant, ridiculed it, but kept it going and exploited it. **The falsehood……battle**—Byron could not stand British Philistinism, and denounced the cant, humbug and hypocrisy of the middle class and the misgovernment and oppression resulting from the same, in unsparing terms. **The old order**—the reactionary regime in every country of Europe that followed in the wake of the French Revolution.

Paragraph 21. **Liberals**—the political party in England advocacting free trade, abolition of privilege, democratic reform, etc. **Queen Mab**—a speculative poem by Shelley, written when he was about eighteen. Ianthe falls asleep, visits the court of Queen Mab in her dreams, and hears of the scheme of the universe from Ahasuerus. **The witch of Atlas**—Shelley's poem in which he invents the myth of a beautiful and beneficent witch, daughter of Apollo, who tames wild

beasts, plays pranks in her magic boat among the clouds, can see the souls of men under their mortal terms, blesses those whom she sees most beautiful, but 'writes strange dreams' under the brain of those who are less beautiful, and mischievously crosses their purposes. **The Sensitive Plant**—by Shelley. The poet's own spirit is a sensitive plant in the midst of a garden, tended by a lady, the ideal of beauty. The lady dies, and death and corruption settle on the garden. The poet questions whether, beauty being permanent, it is not life that is unreal. **Old order**—Byron assails it in his *Vision of Judgement*.

Paragraph 22. **Lady Blessington**—(1789-1849), authoress. **Then at last came forth......agony**—In poetry which he wrote in his true vein, Byron revealed his real self at war with the cant and hypocrisy of the age, with the form of government and oppression and human misery, at which he lashes with his superb satirical power. Here he comes upon the real Byron. **Inert**—passive. **The struggle..,...soul**—the struggle that he carried on kept him from understanding his soul to British Philistinism.

Paragraph 23. **True, as a man..............astray**—Byron knew no self-government, and made a wreck of his life. **True......future**—he could not see his way through his life, and, therefore, he could not show the way to other people. **Yet a personality......literature**—Neither Byron's personality nor his rhetorical power is such as to be under-estimated. His personality played an important part in his life, and his rhetorical power played an important part in literature. **Along with suffering**—in addition to his marvellous rhetorical and satirical powers, he had a sense of beauty, as relating to Nature and human action and suffering. **His representation...improvising**—there is little sense of effort or strain in what he writes about himself or in his description.

Paragraph 24. **A Tribute........himself**—the best tribute that Arnold can pay to Byron is not to laud him up, but to separate the dross from his good poetry, and let him be represented by the latter. **Lucubrations**—literary composition, produced by a long and painful study.

Paragraph 25. **Endymion**—a political novel (1880) by Disraeli. There are some cleverly drawn characters and entertaining pictures of life in high social and political spheres.The period covered is that of the administration of Lord Melbourne and Sir Robert Peel **Lord Beaconsfield** —Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), English statesman and novelist. **It looked......saw**—Society people read Byron's poetry and Disraeli's *Endymion*, and fancied that they saw their own portraits there, and thought no more either of Byron or of Disraeli, or of the gift of each in drawing human characters and society in which they are living. **Make-believe**—pretence. **As the inevitable break up...... strength**—Byron denounced British Philistinism, which but stressed the English middle-class. Arnold believed that the old order was breaking up (we do not know how it is true), and that Byron played an important part in it. So Arnold fondly believed that the middle class would soon awake from its intellectual torpor, that the aristocracy would rise to a higher cultural level, and that the lower class would cease to be coarse and beastly. Arnold thinks that his campaigning against British Philistinism had done much towards regenerating English society. It is but a fond hope of Arnold, but it does not seem to have materialized.

Paragraph 26. **He was......inferior**—*N.B.* Wordsworth, as Arnold thinks, revealed to us the abiding sources of joy and consolation. In this respect he is superior to Byron and has other gifts. He has a marvellous satirical power ; he can visualize characters and incidents—and he fought a lifelong battle against British Philistinism and all that it meant—cant, hypocrisy, intellectual sorididness, misgovernment, oppression and consequent human misery. In a sense, then, he is superior to Wordsworth. Byron was alive to the stern realities of life, which reacted upon his poetry. Wordsworth believed fatuously in the holy plan of Nature, and shut his eyes to the evils of time ; he was more or less a self-centred poet.

Paragraph 27. **Keats......them**—Keats had a finer poetic instinct than either Wordsworth or Byron. **Wrecked... opium**—Coleridge had certainly finer poetic gifts than Wordsworth; about 1796 he took to opium, and it had a

disatrous effect upon his powers of will and genius. **Beautiful and ineffectual......angel vain**—*N.B.* Arnold has already said that Shelley has little of substance in his poetry and dreams of reforming society. But Arnold pays a tribute to his unworldly spirit.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. 1. Give a brief review of the estimate of Byron by foreign critics.

Ans. Byron enjoyed an immense vogue in his own day. His fame on the Continent was next only to that of Shakespeare. Goethe set up the Byron-cult in Europe, and in Germany Byron came to be prized above Goethe. Edmund Scherer says, "*Byron* is one of our French superstitions." *But* Scherer was not blind to his faults. He points out that Byron was never able to reach the region of art impersonal and disinterested, and that though he was gifted with creative power, wit, and eloquence, he treated hardly any subject but one—himself, and he posed all his life. Scherer might have been rather blunt in his remarks, but we cannot deny the shortcomings mentioned by him. Byron could not certainly get away from himself, and sought to project himself into some of the imaginary characters he created—Childe Harold, for example. Taine, another French critic, on the other hand, thinks that Byron stands above all contemporary English poets. Arnold endorses rather Scherer's view that the man in Byron is unsatisfactory, and picks out his vulgarity and affectation, or as Scherer has said—"He posed all his life long." The truth is that Byron has little of the artist in him.

Goethe has certainly a sane and balanced judgment upon Byron. In his household was started Byron-worship ; his daughter-in-law was a passionate admirer of Byron ; yet Goethe did not err in his appraisement of Byron. The Time-Spirit, he seemed to have thought, was working in favour of Byron. He said that Byron was the greatest talent of the century, and that he was different from all the rest of English poets, and in the main greater. He admired his

daring, dash, and grandiosity. But he pointed out too Byron's failings—the negative and polemical spirit in much of his poetry, the note of revolt and scepticism, the straining after the unlimited, too much of empiricism *i.e.*, the indiscriminate use of his own experience. He said also, "the moment he reflects, he is a child."

Here we have both the positive and negative sides stated clearly. By balancing them we can arrive at a true measure of Byron. Arnold has attempted this. When Goethe said that Byron was different from the rest of English poets, and in the main greater, he was thinking not so much of his poetry as of his personality. It was a unique personality that distinguished him from other English poets. So Swinburne speaks of 'the splendid and imperishable excellence : '*the excellence of sincerity and strength.*' And Byron hurled himself against British Philistinism, and spent all his sincerity and strength in that fight. He was up in arms against "the falsehood, cynicism, insolence, misgovernment, oppression, with their consequent unfailing crop of human misery": his daring, dash and grandiosity could not have been expressed in a better way.

We can next note his short-comings, as pointed out by Goethe. First, his negative and polemical spirit. It tends to make his poetry rhetorical and pungent, especially when he, in a satirical vein, often employed unsparingly. He can have little artistic restraint in such a case which accounts for his lapses in taste and expression. Secondly, his straining after the unlimited. As a result of this he has rarely been able to achieve a poetic whole. That is too an artistic failure. He pays too much attention to details and forgets their relation to the total effect; subordination of parts to the whole, which is the concern of an artist, is apt to be ignored by Byron. Goethe is fully aware of this blemish of Byron. Thirdly, "the moment he reflects, he is a child." If we compare Byron with the Italian poet, Leopardi, we see the difference. Leopardi is a poet of pessimism—and negative in a sense like Byron. But he has the sense of style, the true instinct of an artist; he has also a firm grasp of the issues he poses. In philosophic thought Leopardi is far superior to Byron. Byron revolts against British Philistinism, but has nothing positive

to offer in its place. The final award that Arnold makes is that a personality of Byron's force counts not for a little in life, and that a rhetorician of Byron's force will have value in poetry when in addition he has a strong and deep sense for what is beautiful in Nature as well as in human action and suffering.

Q. 2. Goethe says of Byron, "The English may think of Byron what they please, but it is certain that they can point to no poet who is his like." Elucidate.

Ans. See Answer to Q. 1.

Q. 3. Compare Byron, Leopardi and Wordsworth after Arnold, with comments of your own.

Either Byron or Wordsworth is less of an artist than Leopardi. The sense of style never fails Leopardi—he has the sure and firm touch of a true artist, but Wordsworth often lapses into prosiness, and at rare moments writes in a nobly plain manner, and that again Nature puts into him; and Byron sometimes writes in an execrable style, and it is only when he seems to forget himself, when he drops his theatrical pose that he can write with his telling force. Lady Blessington rightly says that Byron's great defect is his total want of selfpossession. Byron's unique personality makes all the differences to him. And Swinburne says that it covers all his differences and outweighs all his defects. It counts for much in his life, and certainly increases the value of his negative and polemical poetry. Leopardi too has a negative approach to life, he is richer in thought and knowledge, and has a firmer grasp of the issues he tackles. The moment Byron reflects, he is a child—Goethe rightly says of him. Leopardi is much superior to him in depth and range of thought. Leopardi is a superior artist and thinker too, but because he is a poet of pessimism, his range is rather restricted. Neither Wordsworth nor Byron has any sure sense of style, but each has a different outlook in his criticism of life. We should not say here that one's criticism of life is superior to that of another. They have a different approach altogether. Wordsworth reveals to us the abiding sources of joy in Nature and in primary human feelings and sentiments. It may be a

permanent possession to mankind. Byron waged war against falsehood, cynicism, cant and hypocrisy that infected society as well as against misgovernment and oppression. It was against British Philistinism that he exhausted all the sincerity and strength of his personality. It is a different matter whether Byron's lifelong fight would ever awaken the English middle class from its intellectual torpor, release the aristocracy from its materialism, and cure the lower class of its brutality. We have no reason to praise Wordsworth's criticism of life above Byron's. After Wordsworth lost his faith in the French Revolution, which he greeted with the words :

> Bliss was it in that down to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven,

he seemed to have retreated into himself, and turned to Nature as the source of comfort, and it was nothing but self-hypnotism, if the truth is to be told. Byron could look beyond himself unlike Wordsworth, and fully aware of the *malaise* of the age, lashed at the cant, selfishness and cynicism at the top, and at the ignorance and misery below. It is far away from the self-centered outlook of Wordsworth.

GENERAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Q. Discuss the critical principles which are responsible for Matthew Arnold's exaltation of Wordsworth over other poets.

Ans. Poetry is a criticism of life—that is the main dictum of Arnold. By criticism of life he means the application of ideas to life. The ideas are moral ideas, for life is after all moral. It follows then, that Arnold cannot be without a moral bias in his criticism. He advocates disinterestedness, when he discusses the three estimates. The historic estimate regards a poet in relation to his age, or in relation to particular phase of development in poetry. The person[illegible]mate takes into consideration the personal likes and [illegible] a critic in judging a poet. The real estimate is [illegible] values: it concentrates

on the real excellences of a poet; it the sense for the best, and cannot be satisfied with short of anything perfection.

We have to start with Arnold's definition of poetry—a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. When criticism of life is explained by Arnold as application of ideas to life, he emphasizes the matter or substance of poetry above the form or manner. The poet has, as a matter of fact, to deal with his own experience in life, and he has got to reinterpret it, and transform and transmute it by his imagination, or shaping, or creative power. It is his own ideas that he puts into his poetry, and these ideas, as Arnold conceives, have to do with life. And Arnold imagines the main issue to be—how to live. A poet does indeed sometimes deal with ideas that have universal cast (for example, Shakespeare, a great poet does universalize his ideas). They have indeed a bearing upon life, but it is questionable whether the ideas of a poet are necessarily to be acted upon in life. It is not certainly the task of a poet to deal with the problems of life. A lyric poet expresses his personal feelings and sentiments ; they may be shared by others, or stimulate others, and they may have even a universal appeal. If how to live is the main question with a poet, as Arnold maintains, it follows that a poet is concerned with the problems of life, and, therefore, with moral issues. This is rather restricting the function of a poet. The moral bias of Arnold becomes too obvious then.

Poetic truth and poetic beauty are, however, more important elements. Poetic truth refers to the matter or substance of poetry, but it is to be received by the poet's imaginative treatment of the facts of life, which does not mean any departure from truth—it is only an imaginative rendering of what the poet feels and experiences in life, and as such, it is concerned with the form or expression. The point is that form and matter should be considered as invisible in poetry. The truth of life, when put into poetry, becomes poetic truth as it is rendered by the imagination of the poet, and becomes a thing of beauty—and a thing of

beauty is a joy for ever. And here truth and beauty are identical, and Keats may well say :

> Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Let it again be noted that poetic truth, as we understand it, is no absolute truth, but truth "coloured by the artist's mood, seen through the medium of the artist's mind." It is the poet's mental reflection of the external reality.

Arnold's principles of criticism clearly enunciated, we are in a position to understand his views about Wordsworth. First, he holds that Wordsworth's greatness lies in a noble application of ideas to life. Of course, Wordsworth has written much poetry that is dull, flat and prosaic. Such poetry is to be separated from all that is best in Wordsworth. When he is judged by his best, Arnold says that we find in him a noble application of ideas to life. So, Wordsworth may be said to satisfy the final test of poetry. Arnold refers to Voltaire who says that no nation has treated moral ideas with more energy and depth than the English nation. Arnold has this saying of Voltaire in mind when he examines the essential qualities of Wordsworth as a poet. He takes pains to explain that moral ideas do not necessarily mean that a poet must write moral and didactic poem. How to live is a moral question, and a poet cannot be indefferent to it. A poet can be a poet of revolt or may have an escapist or a negative attitude to life. A poet cannot certainly be bound down to the accepted values of life, that is to say, the conventional standard of morality. Both Shelley and Byron broke away from the conventional standard of morality. The greatness of a poet cannot be determined then by a moral standard, or as Arnold calls a noble application of ideas to life. Arnold says that Wordsworth is so great because he makes a noble application of ideas to life. He is great because he deals powerfully with life, and, as Arnold maintains, he is greater than Voltaire, Pope, Lessing, Schiller. These poems of Wordsworth in which other critics discover some sort of philosophy, cannot be considered

to be great. For example, *The Excursion*, despite its length and whatever philosophy of life he propounds in it, cannot be great, according to Arnold. Here Arnold seems to contradict himself. Philosophy of life is indeed profound application of ideas to life. His greatness lies in his discovery of the source of joy and peace in Nature, but Arnold rejects his philosophizing about Nature, but he does in his *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*. In the latter poem he associates the high instinct and affection which manifest themselves in childhood (it is to be noted that they might have so manifested themselves in Wordsworth's childhood and that what is true of him, might not be true of others) with divine home recently left, and which later fades away with growing years, to be replaced by thought and reflection, which will spring from, and be sustained by, the abiding joy and peace of Nature. In this connection, again, Arnold points out that Wordsworth's love of Nature which gives all strength and meaning to his poetry, and which is a source of inspiration and poetic creation to him, may be meaningless to those who are little interested in Nature. Yet Arnold maintains that Wordsworth is so great because he discovers joy in widest commonalty spread. Wordsworth does set forth his ideas

On man, on nature and human life.

He certainly turns to Nature for all that he wants to learn about men ; Nature comes to him before man. But the truth is that it is man who projects his own thoughts into Nature, or he may see but very little in Nature. Arnold thinks that Wordsworth appeals to the primary and elementary feelings and sentiments of his readers by his nature-poetry. His nature-poetry then establishes his greatness. It is true that as a poet of Nature, Wordsworth will hold an important place. But his limitation in this regard have now been pointed out. His nature-poetry suffers from his lack of his awareness of the hostile and sinister elements in Nature. It is a side of Nature which Wordsworth seems to have deliberately overlooked except for a bare hinge of it in his poem, *Ruth*, but which Thomas Hardy fully exploits.

Arnold certainly thinks that Wordsworth is greater than Keats, Shelley and Byron. These things negative in Shelley and Byron in their opposition to the conventional morality of the day. Keats appears to him to be too much of a worshipper of the senses, and not to have arrived at years of maturity in his poetical career. However, Arnold does not deny to Keats 'natural magic' which he seems to share with Shakespeare. At least he recognizes one element of greatness in Keats. Arnold dismisses Shelley as a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating the void with his luminous wings in vain. It means that he may be an angel-like being, but there is little substance in his poetry. His supreme lyric power is ignored by Arnold. In Byron he discovers a puissant personality, torn asunder by a conflict, and in his verse an occasional sense of beauty, but mostly rhetoric. In none of them Arnold finds a profound application of ideas to life. And so they must be less great than Wordsworth's".

Lastly, the question is whether Wordsworth's application of ideas to life was really conditioned by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. It is the question of style. Wordsworth does now and then attain a noble manner. When he is inspired, Nature, as Arnold puts it, seems to take the pen out of his hand, and to write for him, with a bare, sheer, penetrating power. But it happens rarely. His style is heavy and ponderous, as we see in *The Excursion*. Arnold points out the defects of Wordsworth's poetry. In any case he is not a poet uniformly excellent. Arnold bases his greatness on his profound application of ideas to life, and it is a phrase which may mean anything or nothing High seriousness is laid down by Arnold as the test of great poetry. He does not claim high seriousness for Wordsworth. No one will deny that Wordsworth is a great poet in his own way. But it is on a slender basis—the discovery of the source of joy and peace in Nature—that his greatness is placed by Arnold.

2. Q. Do you agree with the view that Matthew Arnold

was rather a propagandist for criticism than a critic, a popularizer rather than a creator of ideas.

Ans. Arnold is a poet and critic at the same time, but he is not a professional critic. As a critic he has sound, penetrating judgments, and has discovered some important truths and principles, and these he has sought to propagate as in his *Essays in Criticism.* In a sense, then, he is a propagandist for criticism. He lays down sound principles of criticism, distinguishing between historic, personal and real estimates, defining what poetry is, and how it is to be correctly valued. He draws his principles of criticism from his study of the ancients. He adopts the test of great poetry, laid down by Aristotle, that is to say, poetry should possess a higher truth and a higher seriousness than history. He discovers his seriousness in the great Greek poets, and he holds by it. Both Shakespeare and Milton have this note of high seriousness—Milton almost constantly, while Shakespeare with occasional lapses into conceits and far-fetched expressions. It will indeed be a high standard by which to judge poetry. It is exhibited in the happy union of thought and expression, which seems to carry our minds beyond ourselves, and which seems to be a new revelation to us. Arnold quotes lines and phrases from poets as illustrations of this great truth, as he conceives it to be. He evolves his principles of criticism from his study of the ancients, and he recommends them to be followed by the critics of his time. The historic or the personal estimate often vitiates criticism, and he desires all critics to guard against it. He lays down the main principles of criticism in *The Study of Poetry*, and also shows their general application. When he reviews the poets in his *Essays in Criticism*, he repeats again and again these principles, and enforces them in his judgments. From this it will appear that he has a propagandist purpose.

As a critic he might not have discovered any strikingly new truths or principles, but he has certainly discovered them by his study of the ancients and by his own reflections, and he puts them on a sound footing by his practice of these principles. The real estimate he defines and proposes, seems to suggest an absolute standard which it may often prove

to be difficult to follow. But he sets the very idea that a critic should strive after. And he has done a good service as such, and he deserves to be highly esteemed as a critic for this service alone. We know that individual idiosyncrasies have to play a large part in a critic. The true aim of a critic will be achieved if he can rise above these idiosyncrasies, Arnold shows indeed the right line of criticism in his insisting on the real estimate. His definition of poetry as a criticism of life has heen objected to by some critics. But he clearly states what he means by it. "The grand power of poetry is its interpretative power," this is *all* that he means by criticism of life. Poetry must appeal to the imagination or the "imaginative reason," as Arnold puts it, and it is the interpretative power of poetry, or its criticism of life, that will call forth the imagination in the reader, and the high seriousness which is the outstanding characteristic of the master-mind is an important factor in producing this effect. Aronld then appears to be right in his definition of poetry and the test he proposes of the greatness and excellence of poetry, though the phrases used by him seem to be a little unconventional from which rises the demur of some critics.

Arnold might have restated the old truths and principles of criticism, and that very clearly and emphatically, but his greatness as a critic, as an original critic too, remains unquestioned. So, Herbert W. Paul writes, "Matthew Arnold's literary criticism, once regarded by young enthusiasts as a revelation, has long since taken a secure place in English letters. Like his poetry, unlike his theology and his politics, it has original and intrinsic value. It is penetrating as well as brilliant, conscientious as well as imaginative............He reminded, or informed, the British public that criticism was a serious thing; that good criticism was just as important as good authorship; that it was not a question of individual taste but partly received authority, and partly of trained judgment." Saintsbury too recognizes the greatness of Arnold as a critic, though he confesses that he disagrees with some of his critical canons. He writes that there are "critics very much greater in originality, greater in catholicity, perhaps greater in felicity of individual

utterance," and yet he finds that "he is of their race and lineage." He is great as a critic, and it may not be denied that he wanted to propagate the true and sound principles of criticism, and to popularize them. His aim was to reform the incoordinated and contradictory and individualistic principles of criticism, prevalent in his day. It was the right moment that one like Arnold should formulate the sound and legitimate principles of criticism.

Q. 2. "Arnold's chief limitation as a critic was that he was not aware of his own limitations." Discuss.

Ans. Arnold is an eminent critic, and lays down principles of criticism that can be fairly applied by any sensible critic. These principles are of general application, and no rigorous conditions are in fact imposed upon a critic. Arnold has done a good service in setting general lines of criticism, and it is left to a critic how he should utilize them for his own benefit as well as for the enlightenment of the public. Till the time of Arnold, criticism has been more or less arbitrary in the sense that each individual critic followed his own taste or indiosyncrasy. Now the principles of critcism which Arnold lays down are aimed at objective ends and may to a certain extent curtail individualistic trends in criticism. His discussion of the three estimates—historic, personal and real—is a good contribution. Of course each of these estimates has a value of its own, and none can be totally rejected. Personal estimate which allows for individual indiosyncrasies, is a trend that has been too palpable in criticism, and it doubted whether it can be totally abolished. A critic is apt to bring his own taste and judgment to bear upon what assesses of literary value in the work of literature—he cannot help it, but he should, in all fairness to his judgment, strive for an objective evaluation of a literary work. This is what Arnold intends when he discusses the three estimates. The real estimate can bring a critic to a fairly correct view of the author he is reviewing. Arnold generally considers poetry for criticism, and reviews some English poets, incidentally referring to continental poets, without going into specific details. He is concerned with applying the general principles of criticism. He does not go into

the classification of poetry, epic or narrative, dramatic, lyric poetry, each requiring a different set of rules for judgment, or a slightly varied standard. He proposes high seriousness, as an infallible test of great poetry. While he seems to emphasize the matter or substance of poetry, he is not indifferent to the former style. High seriousness includes both a perfection of matter and form and this is well attested by the examples he cites—the lines and passages of poetry, which show the perfection of both form and matter. Arnold should have done well if he had affirmed the indivisibility of form and matter. He has drawn his principles of criticism from his study of the ancients, and in support of his creed of high seriousness he quotes Aristotle. It should be pointed out here that Arhold has generalized a little too much as regards the test to be applied to poetry when he proposes high seriousness as one. The note of high seriousness may reveal itself in stray lines of short lyrics—and Arnold has given such examples from short lyrics as from those of Burns. When we consider lyrics, we do not look for high seriousness ; the lyrics are, as a rule, the expression of a passing mood or a fancy of a poet, and the very character of a lyric may be marred by seriousness. Being rather pre-occupied with the question of high seriousness, Arnold has given no serious consideration to lyrics. High seriousness is a quality that will be preferably sought in an epic. Arnold seems to have been too much swayed by the art of criticism, as practised by the ancients.

It is, no doubt, a limitation of Arnold that he should have paid so little attention to the distinction between one kind of poetry and another, as the result of which there might be some confusion in applying the test he proposes. For example, we cannot always apply the test of high seriousness to lyrics of a passing interest. In a lyric or two there may casually be verse which may satisfy this test. A poem cannot be judged by such stray lines of verse, in which there is a perfect combination of form and matter. Secondly, it may be pointed out that while Arnold defines the three estimates, and warns the critic against applying either the historic or personal estimate, he ignores them in his own practice. He applies the historic estimate to Gray when Arnold considers

him in relation to his age, and explains the scantiness of his production by the sterility of the age. He says that Gray would have done much better if he had been born either in the beginning of the seventeenth century or in the middle of eighteenth century. Arnold has been unfair both to Keats and Shelley because he indulges here in his personal idiosyncrasies. It is on moral grounds that he falls foul of Keats and Shelley. However, Arnold attempts to liberalize criticism, and puts it on a sound basis.' Arnold has not been able to get rid of his moral preoccupation. He cannot tolerate Keats' sensuousness which, he even supposes, degenerates into sensuality. And while he criticises Dowden for exploiting the details of Shelley's personal life, particularly his relationship with Harriet Westbrook, which, though unsavoury, there is an attempt to sentimentalize, Arnold himself uses these very details as damaging evidence, and these very details sway his judgment of Shelley. He has very little to say about Shelley's poetry. He seems to be incapable of appreciating the quintessential lyrical qualities of Shelley's poetry, This is a limitation of Arnold, which is too mainifest. Arnold can be a good judge of epic or narrative poetry, and though he himself has written some good lyrics, it is understandable why he should pay scant regard to lyrical poetry. Arnold breaks the rules he lays down for his fellow-critics. He warns them against applying the personal or historic estimate. It is by a personal estimate that he raises Wordsworth too high and drags down Keats and Shelley so low. He gives to Gray more than his due by applying the historic estimate. So, we may say that while Arnold is good critic whose abilities are recognized by other critics too, he is not aware of his own limitations. But we need not find faults with Arnold in this respect. No critic can totally get rid of his personal idiosyncrasies, and every critic is valued for his personal taste and judgment, though every reader may not agree with him. There can be little reason to depreciate Arnold because he is unaware of his own limitations. Very few critics are aware of their own limitations. Secondly, Arnold proposes too exacting a standard, and not to speak of other critics, he himself has not been able to keep up to it.

Q. 4. "Arnold's literary criticism is often vitiated by his strong moral sense." Apply this pronouncement to Arnold's criticism of Milton, Wordsworth and Byron.

Ans. See *Answer to Q. 1.*

Arnold, while he attempts to place criticism on a sound basis, drawing his principle from the ancients, has not been able to exclude his moral bias. Milton is a poet with strong moral bias. His conception of a poet was that a poet should be "a true poet, that is a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things." Milton was one of "devoute prayer to the Eternal Spirit that can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowest fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases." It was with such a conviction that Milton took up his vocation as a poet. He constantly lived in the company of the great Herbrew poets and prophets, the great poets of Greece and Rome. Arnold, a well-trained classicist, will naturally be drawn to Milton who, he thinks, can save England from the Anglo-Saxon contagion, by which he means the materialistic outlook and utilitarian aims and purposes of the British people, and more particularly of the American people. Then again, to Arnold Milton appears as the supreme master of the great style. In perfection of rhythm and diction he comes near to Virgil and Dante. Arnold can but think of the great Latin and Italian poets, when he measures Milton's qualities. Milton uniformly maintains this great style, but this sureness of perfect style, as Arnold points out, even Shakespeare does not always command. Arnold praises Milton for his high seriousness and great style—and there can be no higher praise for an English poet. It is Arnold's moral bias that makes him rate Milton so highly.

He cannot praise Wordsworth so highly for his style. Wordsworth's style is variable. Sometimes, Wordsworth can catcn the note of cold, startling plainness and simplicity, but often he sinks into mere twaddle. There are sometimes Miltonic echoes in Wordsworth. So Arnold points out that it is necesary to separate good from bad in Wordsworth's poetry before there can be a proper appreciation of him. Arnold would give little value to the system of philosophy

that other critics have discovered in his nature poetry, or in his *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*. Arnold discovers his greatness in his noble application of ideas to life. Wordsworth brings to us the joy that nature offers, the joy that springs from simple primary affections and duties—and it is with extraordinary perception and insight that Wordsworth discovers this enduring joy. His judgments of Wordsworth are fair and correct. But when we compare Arnold's judgments of Keats aud Shelley, to whom he has been anything but fair, we easily understand the reason. Arnold cannot do justice to Keats and Shelley because they do not satisfy his moral standard.

Arnold's definition of poetry is that it is a criticism of life. By criticism of life, again, Arnold means an application of ideas to life—and he holds that these ideas are moral ideas. He does not of course mean that the greatness of a poet is to be judged by moral themes on which he writes. He also points out that there may be poetry of revolt—and it is poetry that breaks away from the accepted values of life. Poetry of revolt cannot be a noble application of ideas to life, such as Arnold finds in the poetry of Wordsworth. Now Byron has certainly written the poetry of revolt, and Arnold cannot rate him very high. Byron was a poet highly admired on the Continent. He was praised and admired next to Shakespeare. Goethe started the Byron cult in Europe. Arnold mostly takes Goeth's views of Byron. Byron, as he thinks, has little capacity for deep thought and reflection. The moment he reflects, he is child. This is Goethe's view, and Arnold seems to share it. Arnold owns with Goethe that Byron has a splendid and puissant personality. Arnold has not very much to say about Byron. In his opinion Byron has neither truth and seriousness of substance and matter nor felicity and perfection of diction and manner. Byron's greatness was too well known on the Continent, and Arnold could not leave it unacknowledged despite his moral lapses. He acknowledges that Byron has a direct vision of things, and can write with force, sincerity and felicity when he is in the mood, and that he has too passionate a love of the beautiful in Nature and of the beautiful in human action and suffering. Arnold has not been, after all, unfair to

Byron, though his moral sense cannot reconcile itself to his derelictions.

Q. 5. Indictate briefly tve poetic theories propounded in Arnold's essays on *The Sudy of Poetry* and on *Wordsworth*, and examine their validity, critical value and consistency.

Ans. Arnold has a classical turn of mind. He draws his principles of criticism from his study of the ancients.The function of criticism, as he maintains, is to know and propagate the best that has been thought and said in the word. It means that a critic should have a broad outlook and be familiar with the thought currents of the world. W. B. Wordsworth writes: "Matthew Arnold finds a starting point for his criticism in his knowledge of the literature of ancient Greece.....And he subsequently finds another starting point in his knowledge of Continental literature. In this way he approaches the study of English literature from two separate points of view, and finally he acquires that independence, that detachment from local and historical interest, which is the crowning merit of a critic.

Worsfold does not hint that Arnold ever clung to 'romantic' tradition in criticism. In the *Preface* to the 1853 edition of his Poems he expounds his principles of criticism' First, what are the eternal objects of poetry? He answers that they are actions, human actions and as such they must have an inherent interest in themselves, which can be communicated in an interesting manner by the art of the poet. And he mentions Achilles, Prometheus, Clytemnestra, Dido whom Greek poets dealt with—and they must have been very adequate subjects for ancient poetry, and he writes, "......yet I fearlessly assert that *Hermann and Dorotheo*, *Childe Harold*, *Jocelyn*, *The Excursion*, leave the reader cold in comparison with the effect produced upon him by the later books of the *Iliad*, by the Orestea, by the episode of Dido. And why is this ? Simply because in the three latter cases the action is greater, the personages nobler, the situations more intense : and this is the true basis of the interest in a political work and this alone." He is primarily thinking here of Greek tragedies and the Greek epic, the *Iliad*, and draws his inferences

from them. While he emphasizes the importance of action in a poem—and it may be true of an epic, or a narrative poem, or a drama,—what about a lyric poem ? Action has very little to do with a lyric poem; a lyric poem is concerned with the personal thoughts and sentiments of the poet. Then he emphasizes totality of impression; this is again true of a narrative poem. He writes, "We have poems which seem to exist merely for the sake of single lines and passages, not for the sake of producing any total impression. We have critics who seem to direct their attention merely to detached expression to the language about the action, not the action itself." Then he points out the difference between the ancients and the moderns. "With them, the action predominated over the expression of it; with us, the expression predominates over the action. Not that they failed in expression, or were inattentive to it; on the contrary, they are the highest models of expression, the unapproached because it is so admirably kept in its right degree of prominence; because it is so simple and so well subordinated; because it draws its force directly from the pregnancy of the matter it conveys." Shakespeare of all English writers satisfies the test and condition which he specifies here. And Shakespeare is so great because he has an unerring sense of action—action that is good for poetry.. He chose subjects as *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*. Arnold points out that those who imitated Shakespeare concentrated on his wonderful gift of expression, and neglected his other excellences, for example, his shaping power and constructive skill—his marvellous manipulation of the action of poetry. Arnold mentions in this connection Keats's *Isabella* which displays the poet's gift of exquisite phrasing, but little sense of action. So he writes, "For we must never forget that Shakespeare is the great poet, he is from his skill in discerning and firmly conceiving an excellent action, from his power of intensely feeling a situation, from intimately associating himself with a character ; not from his gift of expression which rather even leads him astray, degenerating sometimes into a fondness for curiosity of expression, into an irritability of fancy, which seems to make it impossible for him to say a thing plainly, even when the press of the action demands a very direct language, or its level character the very simplest.

Arnold sets up a very exacting standard, which is mainly based upon his study of Greek tragedies and partly of Shakespeare. Now in his *Essays* in *Criticism* he covers poets who cannot certainly rank with ancient Greek poets, namely the eminent writers of Greek tragedies, nor with Shakespeare. it is from his study of Greek classic that his principles of criticism are drawn, but Shakespeare, a romantic dramatist, stands by the test by which Arnold judges the Greek poets. Keats and Shelley are romantic poets, and they fail by the test that Arnold applies to them. Wordsworth is a pioneer in the Romantic Movement. But Wordsworth may be regarded as a semi-romantic, and he has not at any rate valued expression above thought as a romantic poet is apt to do, and Arnold discovers in him a noble application of ideas to life. Here it may be noted that Arnold gives all that is due to Wordsworth's romantic sentiments and feelings, with regard to Nature and Man. He admires Gray because he seems to have studied and assimilated the spirit of the Greeks, but discovers none of his romantic thoughts and sentiments. His very melancholy, to which Arnold refers, has a romantic cast. He admires Burns for his truth and sincerity, but the lines he quotes from Burns are steeped in a romantic longing :

> Had we never loved sae kindly,
> Had we never loved sae blindly,
> Never met, or never parted,
> We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

Arnold quotes these lines, because they exhibit the exquisite harmony of thought and expression. But he does notice the romantic cast of thought. Proportion and balance are the qualities, valued and cultivated by Greek writers. Romantic writers neglected these qualities. A romantic poet is usually carried away by excess of feeling and passion, by love of beauty, and of the strange, exotic and fantastic. He is generally disregardful of ardour and passion. Naturally Arnold will find himself averse to, or incapble of appreciating a predominantly romantic poet. He finds some affinity between Keats and Shakespeare, and, therefore, has

something good to say about Keats, but very little about Shelley.

It may be doubted whether Arnold ever had anything to do with the traditions of romantic criticism, except censuring the laxity and incoordination of its principle. Romantic criticism allows for the lawlessness of Romantic poets, for their exuberance of feeling and emotion, for their passionate love of beauty—even beauty wild and fantastic, for all their excesses either in thought and emotion or in their expression of them, for their affection of beautiful phrases at the expense of thought. These excesses Arnold cannot tolerate, according to the classical standard of balance and proportion which is adopted by him in criticism. But the quotations he makes in his essay on *The Study of Poetry* have mostly a romantic turn of thought and sentiment. We may instance one or two:

> Absent thee from felicity awhile
>
> Or
>
> O martyr sounded in virginitee
>
> Or
>
> We twa hae paidl't the burn
> From mornin' sun till dine.

Arnold never utters the word—'romantic'—anywhere while he deals with such poets as Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Byron; yet in spite of his classical outlook and taste, he is not unresponsive to their romantic thoughts and sentiments. There is a substratum of the romantic in the inner constitution of Arnold and he might not have been conscious of it, or if he were, he suppressed it. But he does not certainly go by the romantic tradition in judging remantic poets. He sticks to the classical standard of judgment even when he examines a romantic poet, and he does justice to him, as in the case of Wordsworth, within limits. After all classical and romantic are not

mutually exclusive. Romatic poets can discover the elements of romance in classical themes. We may take Wordsworth's *Laodamia*, a classical theme treated by a romantic poet. The fact is then that Arnold is not unresponsive to romantic thoughts and sentiments, but he follows the principle of criticism which he has made his own principle drawn from his study of the ancients. A romantic poet despite his proclivities may have excellence which will satisfy any critical standard. Arnold judges all poets by his classical standard of criticism. There is little sense in drawing a distinction between the classical line of criticism and the romantic line of criticism. The two trends of classicism and romanticism in literature are recognizable. Arnold, it is true, is a classical-minded critic, but it is wrong to assume that he applies one standard to the classical elements in literature and another to the romantic elements. He has, as every critic should have, but one standard of judgment which he uses in studying all poets, whether classical or romantic. He does not revert from one standard to another in judging different poets, as it is assumed here. The point is that whatever the standard of criticism, romantic or classical, it will discover excellence of defects, whether in a romantic or a classical writer.

6. Give a general estimate of Arnold as a Critic.

M. Arnold writes, "It is because criticism has so little kept in the pure intellectual sphere, has so little detached itself from practice, has been so directly polemical and controversial, that it has so ill-accomplished in this country, its best spiritual work which is to keep man from a self-satisfaction which is retarding and vulgarizing, to lead him towards perfections, by making his mind dwell upon what is excellent in itself and the abolute beauty and fitness of things." He takes evidently the business of a critic very conscientiously, and states the function as well as the aim of criticism. Criticism should be kept on the intellectual plane, and made free of any extraneous considerations. Detachment or disinterestedness is the quality to be cultivated by a critic. And so he can dwell upon what is excellent in

itself and reveal to us the beauty and fitness of things, and cure us of self-satisfaction. All this presumes exquisite perception and sensibility, a balanced judgment and a literary conscience on the part of a critic.

In *Culture and Anarchy* he recommends culture as "the great help out of our present difficulties," defining it as "a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know on all matters which most concern us—the best that has been thought and said in the world." By such knowledge we can turn "a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically." 'Culture' here seems to be identical with criticism. The function of criticism, as he conceives it, is to make us acquainted with the best that has been thought and said in this world ; it is to turn a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits. When he demands that a critic should make known the best that has been thought and said in the world, he means that a critic should have a broad outlook, and be familiar with the thought currents of the world. Arnold makes broad-based culture the main spring of criticism. This is pointed out by G. K. Chesterton : "He had a consciousness of Europe much fuller and firmer than that of any of the great men of his great epoch. For instance, he admired the Germans too much as Carlyle admired the Germans too much. But he was not deluded by any separatist follies about the superiority of a Teutonic race. If he admired the Germans it was for being European, signally and splendidly European. He did not, like Carlyle, admire the Germans for being German. Like Carlyle, he relied much on the sagacity of Goethe. But the sagacity of Goethe upon which he relied was not a rugged or cloudy sagacity, the German element in Goethe. It was the Greek element in Goethe, a lucid and equalised sagacity, a moderation and a calm such as Carlyle could not have admired, nay, could not even have imagined."

"A moderation and a calm"—that is what we discover in Arnold's critical assessment. He puts the essential quality of criticism to be disinterestedness. By disinterestedness he means "a free-play of the mind on all subjects which it touches," and exclusion of "those ulterior, political, practical consideration about ideas, which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them, which perhaps ought often to be attached to them, which in this country at any rate are certain to be attached to them quite sufficiently ; but criticism has really nothing to do with them."

He bases his critical principles on his study of Greek literature. Greek objectivity, Greek unity, Greek sense of balance and proportion—all find expression in his criticism. W. B. Worsfold writes : "Matthew Arnold finds a starting point for his criticism in his knowledge of the literature of ancient Greece...............And he subsequently finds another starting-point in his knowledge of continental literature. In this way he approaches the study of English literature from two separate points of view, and finally he acquires that independence, that detachment from local and historical interests, which is the crowning merit of a critic......"

The point will be made still clearer if we quote again G. K. Chesterton : "He saw and very rightly asserted that the fault of the Mid Victorian English was that they did not seem to have any sense of definite excellence. Nothing could be better than the way in which he points out in the very important essay on "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" that the French admit into intellectual problems the same principle of clearly stated and generally admitted dogmas, which all of us in our daily lives admit into moral problems. The French, as he puts it in a good summarising phrase, have a conscience in literary matters ; upon the opposite English evil he poured perpetual satire." It is the vulgar and indiscriminate acceptance of the banal and commonplace by the English, which Arnold

assails again and again. This is what he means by *Philistinism*.

So Arnold laid down certain definite principles of criticism. "Mr. Arnold did not merely criticise books himself. He taught others how to criticise them. He laid down principles if he did not always keep the principles he laid down. Nobody, after reading *Essays in Criticism*, has any excuse for not being a critic"—writes H. W. Paul. In the age of Dryden the only authority quoted was Aristotle. Now Arnold began to exercise a tremendous influence in the sphere of literary criticism —and he began to be quoted in place of Aristotle. It may be pointed out that Arnold's scope was larger. To Aristotle the claims of Greece were the only literary models available ; Arnold had continental literature to range through, if he limited himself only to "the best that has been known and thought in the world." Secondly, Arnold directs his attention to a phase of criticism that did not concern Aristotle. Aristotle shows the critic in relation to art ; Arnold, the critic in relation to the public. The difference is this : Aristotle formulates the principles which govern the making of a poem ; Arnold, the principles by which the best poems can be tested and examined. Arnold owes a duty to society. The task of criticism for Arnold was to prepare a social atmosphere —to make known to the public the best that is known and thought in the world. It has to do with the problem of "perfection," or "how to live." In *Culture and Anarchy* he is mostly concerned with the relation of the critic of literature to the society in which he lives. He started with the examination of the principles of art and then came to this stage. In the beginning, as we have noted above, he did not keep the critic and the poet asunder.

When Arnold put all emphasis on the choice of an excellent action as the groundwork of a poem, he followed but in the footsteps of Aristotle. He rejected *Empedocles* because the choice of the subject was not a good one. The situation in *Empedocles* was painful

without being tragic. While demanding that the action should be presented in an interesting manner by the art of the poet which means that art should be made to yield the highest enjoyment, he develops the theme further by his analysis of the grand style in one of his lectures on Homer and his insistence on 'high seriousness' which is the mark of great poetry.

The enunciation of these principles precluded him from thinking that his own age, the age of industrial development, could really afford genuine themes for poetry. He says that art is a "criticism of life." Speaking of *Anna Karenine*, he says that we should take it "as a piece of life", not "as a work of art," the novel gaining in reality what it loses in art. Here he lands himself on contradiction if his definition of art as a criticism of life is to be taken seriously. Again, he mentions simplicity and severity as the qualities of the grand style. Does it mean that art can have nothing to do with the complex, or that it should shun the age of material progress ? R. A. Scott-James writes, "His faith in the guidance of pre-eminent models, inspiring as they may be, tended to hide from him the potential excellence of the new and untried, of the fresh material from which new art forms and adaptations of the old are for ever being evolved." We mention here, by the way, the limitation of Arnold as a critic.

We may now examine in detail his principles of criticism. "A disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas"—this he conceives to be the task of a critic. How can he fulfil this task ? First, the critic must "see things as they really are." Secondly, he should pass on his ideas to others—his aim being to "make the best ideas prevail." Thirdly, he prepares an atmosphere favourable to the creative genius of the future—and thus he releases "a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power."

The function of a critic then is to promote "culture," In *Culture and Anarchy* he analyses the duty of a critic pre-eminently as a man of culture, concerned with all aspects of living. Culture, according to him, is a study of perfection, which manifests itself in "the moral and social passion for doing good." The man of culture is,. therefore, concerned not only with seeing and knowing truth but with making it prevail.

What he exactly means by *aisinterestedness* needs to be carefully investigated. It is true that a critic should cultivate an unbiassed, independent, objective outlook—should have no axe to grind, as one might say. But Arnold also had something more in mind. We have to recall here his classification of the British people—the *Barbarians i.e.*, the aristocrat who is accomplished in "spirit and politeness," but "inaccessible to ideas and light ;" the bawling, smashing and bear-drinking *Populace* ; the *Philistines*—the complacent middle classes with whom the world is too much, and who lay waste their powers, getting and spending. He wishes that the critic should not let himself be swayed by their ideas and prejudices. *Philistinism* is the antithesis of culture. In his essays on Heine he states the position clearly : "The enthusiast for the idea, the reason, values reason, the idea in and for themselves ; he values them, irrespectively of the practical convenience which their triumph may obtain for him ; and the man who regards the possession of these practical conveniences as something sufficient in itself, something which compensates for the absence or surrender of the idea, of reason, is, in his eyes, a Philistine." It is the ideal of intellectual and spiritual excellence which he consistently upholds, and it is in accord with the best that has been known and thought in the world.

Now the point is that while he emancipates the critic from some degrading prepossessions—from interests that are intellectually unacceptable, he binds him down to "the moral and social passion for doing good." It is not the kind of disinterestedness that we demand of an artist and a critic. Behind Arnold's ideas of perfection is some moral

prepossession ; the disinterestedness which he recommends as the essential of a critic is of a limited kind. R. A. Scott-James points out what this disinterestedness should be: "When I say that the activity of this artist is disinterested, I do not mean that he may not be concerned with any conceivable theme under the sun, but that his business is to provide us with an experience, and that any end he may have beyond making that experience vivid and complete is an alien end, destroying his singleness of purpose wholly disruptive of his art and destructive to its energy." Arnold makes art and criticism subservient to "the moral and social passion for doing good."

Another point needs to be considered here. Arnold seems to put the claims rather too high for the critic. He thinks that the potential poet is waiting, sterile, till the ground is prepared for him by the professional critic. The critic is a John the Baptist. "The elements with which creative power works are ideas ; the best ideas on every matter which literature touches, current at the time." And it is the business of critic to make these ideas avaliable to the creative artist ; the creative artist's work is one of "synthesis and exposition". A great artist, say, one like Shakespeare, does not own so much to a critic as Arnold makes him out to.

Lastly, how to discover the best. It concerns the duty of the critic to literature. Arnold suggests a practical method. In *The Study of Poetry* he writes, "Critics give themselves great labour to draw out in the abstract constitutes characteristics of a quality of poetry. It is much better simply to have recourse to concrete examples;—to take specimens of poetry of the high, the very highest quality, and to say : "The characters of a high quality of poetry are what is expressed *there*." He recommends a "real estimate" as distinguished from the "historic estimate" and "personal estimate", which he discourages. By such a means we shall learn to enjoy the best work of the real classic and appreciate the wide difference between it and all lesser work. He points out that the high qualities lie both in the matter and substance of poetry and in the manner and style. To discover the

best, we must then study and fix in our mind the lives and expressions of great masters, and apply them "as a touch-stone to other poetry".This is indeed a very practical method. Longinus suggested a similar practical test. There are passages he says, in which we may recognise "the beauty and truth of the sublime" because they "always please and please all (fastidious) readers...............and take so strong a hold on the memory that they cannot be forgotten."

Arnold quotes memorable lines of verses from great poets, English and classical—Shakespeare, Milton, Homer, Dante. But how can a reader make sure that he does not err in his choice of the high quality of verse ? M. Arnold quotes the following from Milton :

And courage never to submit or yield,
And what is else not to be overcome.

The poetic quality of these lines is not very high ; the moral may be a noble one. Here we see how Arnold's moral prepossession—his obsession with "the moral and social passion for doing good"—warps his judgment. R. A. Scott-James comments : "Does not the choice of this passage reveal just the danger to which Arnold exposed himself when he set up an ideal of perfection too much associated with the problem of how to live ?...........He has handicapped his own judgment by making it the servant of preconceived standards of excellence which are as much moral as aesthetic. This bias in Arnold's artistic make-up from time to time conflicts with a purely disinterested judgment." His ideal of intellectual and spiritual excellence interferes with his disinterestedness.

If we are to discover the test of great poetry in memorable lines and passages, what about the 'total-impression' of which Arnold speaks ? Are we to judge a poem by its memorable lines, or by its organic unity, by the totality of impression ? The total effect should count more than memorable passages. The comparative method, suggested by Arnold, may be an effective one but we cannot rest on isolated passages, and should compare the whole impression of one work that of a recognized masterpiece. This does not seem to have been emphasized by Arnold.

Then we cannot totally ignore the personal estimate. There is of course the risk that we may be tempted by "our personal affinities, likings and circumstances" to attach greater importance to a work of art than it deserves or than a detached critic would attach to it. But a work of art may mean much to us personally—and we may find the utmost that is really in it. A sense of intimate personal relationship with an author often helps us to a better understanding and a correct evaluation of his work. Saint-Beuve used to take pains to know all that could be known about the life and circumstances of a man of letters. He would not attempt to define a work until he had formed a personal estimate of its author.

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UNIVERSITY QUESTIONS

1. "There is an unmistakable strain of didacticism in Arnold's Critical thoughts but it is the didacticism not of the traditional moralist but of the social evolutionist." Discuss (Pb. 1963 Previous).
2. What exactly did Arnold mean when he argued that poetry would eventually replace religion ? Did he visulise any particular role for criticism in this process? (Pb. 1963)
3. By putting the criticism of Arnold and Eliot side by side "one becomes aware of the extent to which Eliot's criticism has quietly accompalished a revolution" (Mathiessen) Discuss. (Pb. Old 1964)
4. Examine in detail the new task which Arnold gives to criticism. (Pb. Old 1964)
5. How did Arnold seek to revive classical values in humane arts and letters ? (Pb. Old 1964)
6. Discuss the meaning of "tradition" in the critical works of Arnold and Eliot. (Pb. Old 1965)
7. Arnold wanted us to choose "the best, the really excellent" and to eschew, the historic estimate and the personal estimate. Explain his statements and show how far he conformed as a critic to his own standards. (Pb. Old 1965)
8. "For poetry the idea is everything ; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion." Discuss. (Pb. Old 1965)
9. What critical ideas of Arnold as a critic in relation to later development of critical theories. (Pb. Old 1965)
10. Explain what Matthew Arnold means by his statement that criticism should show 'disinterestedness'. (Pb. Old 1967)

11. Have Matthew Arnold's critical ideas withstood the test of time ? Were his critical theories about poetry completely 'original' or 'rational' ? (Pb. Old 1967)

12. What does Matthew Arnold mean by 'a real estimate of poetry' as distinguished from 'the historic' and 'the personal' ? (Pb. Old 1968)

13. Evaluate critically Arnold's contribution to the history of criticism. (Pb. Old 1968)

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2. Hugh Walker : "The English Essay and Essayists.
3. R.A. Scott-James : "The Making of Literature."
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6. Lionel Trilling: 'Matthew Arnold."

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